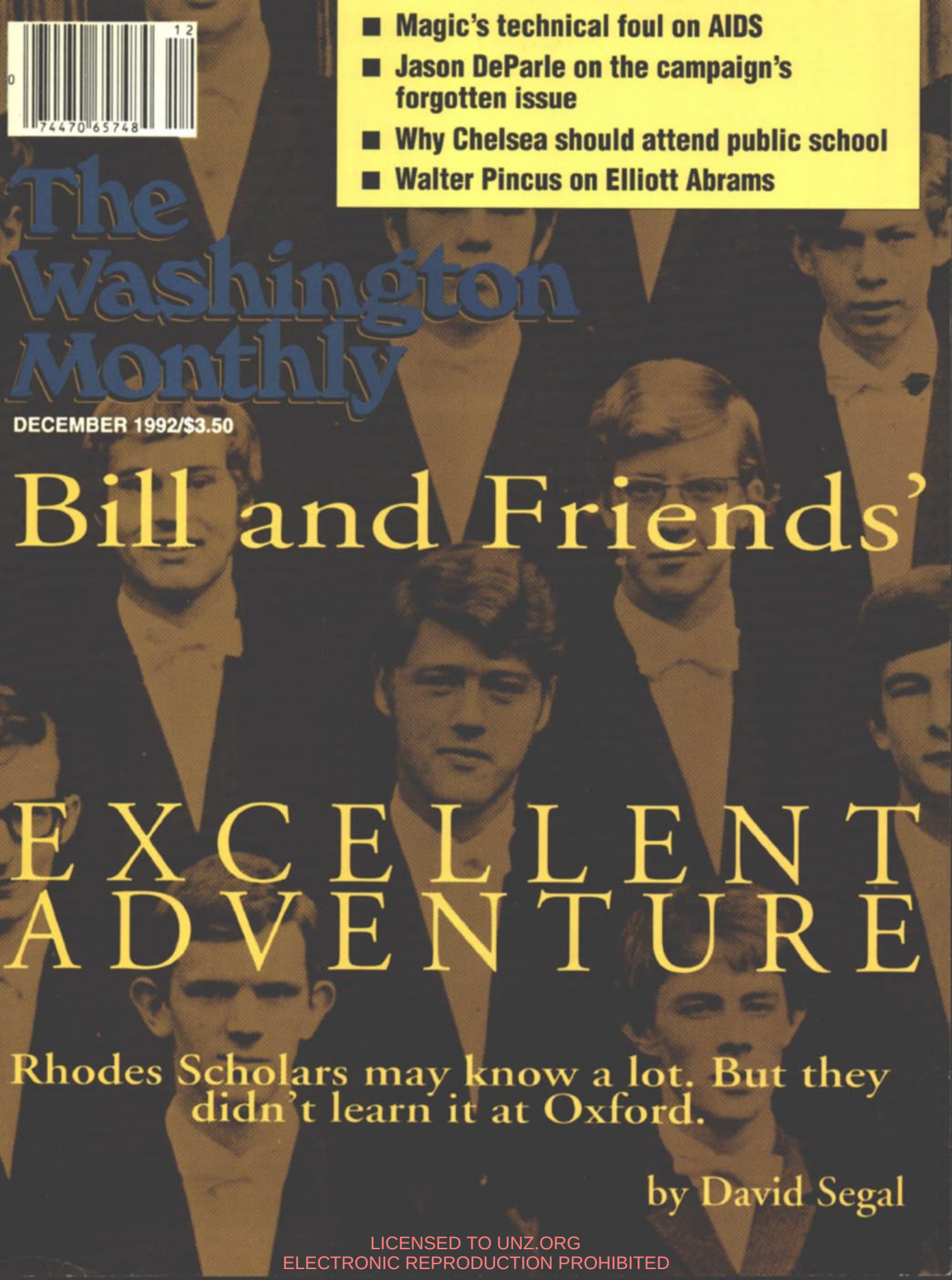

- Magic's technical foul on AIDS
- Jason DeParle on the campaign's forgotten issue
- Why Chelsea should attend public school
- Walter Pincus on Elliott Abrams

The Washington Monthly

DECEMBER 1992/$3.50

Bill and Friends' EXCELLENT ADVENTURE

Rhodes Scholars may know a lot. But they didn't learn it at Oxford.

by David Segal

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LETTERS

Credit due

In an article regarding Hill and Knowlton and the Kuwaiti babies ["Kuwaitgate," Ted Rowse, September], the author gave direct credit to John R. MacArthur for disclosing significant information that I, in fact, reported 21 months earlier.

Writing this note is not something I relish doing. In fact, when *The New York Times* published MacArthur's op-ed piece on January 6, 1992, I held my tongue, confident that those who had paid attention would know that one of the points MacArthur appeared to disclose was not his to reveal. Specifically, MacArthur, after beginning his fourth paragraph, "A little reportorial investigation would have done a great service to the democratic process," added four paragraphs later: "In fact, Mr. Lantos and Mr. Porter allowed the Congressional Human Rights Foundation, a group they founded in 1985, to be housed in Hill and Knowlton's Washington headquarters."

Then comes the September *Washington Monthly* package. First, the Rowse piece mentions that the "big bombshell, however, was a story by *Harper's* magazine publisher John R. MacArthur, which appeared January 1992 on *The New York Times* op-ed page," and goes on to repeat MacArthur's "revelations."

As a reporter for *The San Jose Mercury News*, I disclosed on April 15, 1990 that the organization headed by Lantos and Porter was receiving free rent from Hill and Knowlton. I reported the irony of Lantos' proscribing any questioning of Thomas T. Demery, the HUD official, about the charity Food for Africa. I reported that Hill and Knowlton's clients included the same governments whose interests stood to be affected by the House Foreign Affairs Committee, of which Lantos was a member. I reported that Lantos and Porter's Congressional Human Rights Caucus had failed for years to report its expenditures to the House clerk, in violation of House rules. And so on.

Another piece in the same issue, "Lord of the Lies" by Susan Trento, restates my original reporting regarding the aforementioned subject. It grants neither me nor the *Mercury News* credit—but I can live with that. What I resent is the implication by Trento and Rowse (and MacArthur) that part of the reason Americans didn't know any of these dark secrets was because the working media was asleep or worse. Just listen to Trento's closing lines: "The story is it didn't matter. It didn't matter to people here [in Washington] and it didn't matter to the clients and it didn't matter to the media, because everybody was playing the game."

DAVID WILLMAN
Huntington Beach, California

The editors reply:

The clips enclosed with Mr. Willman's letter show that he reported the Lantos and Porter story well before John R. MacArthur's op-ed.

Tennessee irritated

Your hatchet job on Chris Whittle ["Whittle, Down to Size," Jon Meacham, October] left me with a splitting headache.

Although I no longer work for Whittle, I served as editor of *Tennessee Illustrated*, the defunct general-interest magazine Meacham claims avoided "controversy" and "hard-hitting politics" and generally had as much substance as Dolly Parton's hairdo.

Some of the "dull reading" that *Tennessee Illustrated* published included articles about such "apple-pie issues" as homelessness, cockfighting, the rural health care crisis, teenage drug addiction, the death penalty, industrial policies for the 21st century, the state's most polluted sites, solid waste management, undercover narcotics work, environmental destruction in the Smokies, the decline of small towns, race relations, liquor and tobacco lobbying in the legislature, how tax policy is made there, as well as profiles of Governor Ned McWherter, Al Gore, and the Connecticut marketers who control TNN.

It seems to me that *Tennessee Illustrated* was about as dull and uncontroversial as *The Washington Monthly*.

The article also questions Whittle's "dedication" and "sustained devotion to any idea." He launched *Tennessee Illustrated* at the beginning of the worst recession since the thirties and, against the advice of many others in his company, kept it alive for two years because he thought it had a chance of succeeding. The glancing hatchet whacks of Luddite journalists aside, Whittle possesses an abundance of just what his critics say he lacks: dedication, sustained devotion to new ideas, and, above all else, character and integrity.

GEORGE SPENCER
Knoxville, Tennessee

The author replies:

Tennessee Illustrated addressed real issues, but that does not make it a provocative magazine. Whittle's column was for apple-pie issues, feel-good features were dominant, and substantive matters grazed the surface. Political profiles were generic and the liquor lobbying and tax pieces were short, flattering looks at a liquor lobbyist and a state senator. *Tennessee Illustrated* is part of Whit-

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tle's track record and it shares some characteristics with the Edison Project's hype. Much of the magazine, a large undertaking, was lightweight. Will Edison turn out the same way?

Crewd behavior

I suppose when my favorite magazine devotes so many pages to reviewing my new book, *Acceptable Risks* ["People's Drugs," John Crewdson, October], says so many flattering things about how well written it is and spells my name right, I should take it happily. But it is incredible to me that you would assign my book for review to Crewdson, a journalist who is portrayed in the book at some length as obsessed with one small element of a problem the book tries to take a broad look at. Contrary to the implication of the review, my book stresses that I wanted to avoid the dispute between Crewdson and Robert Gallo except to show that the dispute itself is now demonstrably interfering with AIDS research.

Two specifics really annoyed me. First, Crewdson throws down the ultimate gauntlet and says, "Kwitny . . . makes errors, large and small, that he should have avoided." The only examples he cites, however, are inconsistencies he says exist between Gallo's statements to me and parts of the endless record of the case, which he himself says that only seven people in North America understand. Life being short, I am *proud* not to be one of those seven. I looked at the case long enough to recognize it for the bramble bush it is. I don't consider myself as having erred by accurately and briefly summarizing each side's argument, as given to me, in a dispute I said I had no intention of trying to resolve. Crewdson also objects to my omission of allegations, which he admits are false, made against my subject, Martin Delaney, by a jealous aspirant to the local gay political leadership. I focused instead on Delaney's substantive battles over issues of national political and scientific concern, and certainly gave vent to his opponents on these issues.

Second, Crewdson says I "fabricated the direct quotes that give the story much of its narrative force." As my footnotes say repeatedly, I interviewed at great length the people I could find who were part of the recounted conversations, accounting for most of the dialogue in the book and using their actual words as faithfully as if I had been writing a newspaper story. Interestingly, *The Washington Post* reviewer praised my reporting but said the dialogue didn't "ring true" because everyone spoke in "the same . . . voice." It was their real words, folks.

Crewdson demeans himself by saying I lumped him in with Gina Kolata of *The New York Times* in my criticism of reporters. Kolata's work was knowingly or recklessly inaccurate, as I think I proved. I would never say anything like that about Crewdson, who has been an outstanding reporter over the years. My problem is not really with his work at all, but rather that the editors at his newspaper continued to assign him the same narrow story years after its one essential charge was brought to light. My other problem is that the editors at my favorite magazine would assign him to review my book when he has pitched his career on one side of a single narrow dispute about which I had rendered the most offensive judgment of all: that it just wasn't worth getting into.

JONATHAN KWITNY
Cranford, New Jersey

The author replies:

The best thing about Jonathan Kwitny's new book may be that it was published just in time. In mid-October, as my review went to press, Martin Delaney, one of Kwitny's two superheros, abruptly stepped down as executive director of the San Francisco-based AIDS organization he founded, Project Inform. His recession followed a demand by 12 project staffmembers that Delaney "resign from the executive directorship immediately." The staff's communique complained about "poor long-term planning, poor decision-making, no accountability, lack of administrative skills, absentee leadership, and micromanagement," and

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described Project Inform as undergoing a "financial and spiritual crisis." Among other things, the staff called for a "thorough accounting" of the project's books. Some who signed the letter have also raised questions about the disposition of a $150,000 grant to Project Inform from Burroughs Wellcome, manufacturer of the widely prescribed AIDS drug AZT. Although Project Inform issued a press release last April saying the money would be used to upgrade its "computer capabilities," the staffmembers say no computer equipment has yet been purchased and that their organization's finances are heavily in arrears.

Boo, hiss

In her article on school reform in the United States ["Reform School Confidential," October], Katherine Boo called the Boston University/Chelsea Partnership "one of the most promising and well-intended reform movements in the country." She should have stopped there, rather than continuing to perpetuate the errors of fact she found in one of her sources, *The Boston Globe*. In fact, the *Globe* ombudsman was so concerned about the way in which the paper reported the partnership that he recently devoted most of his column to correcting the errors.

The article fails to recognize the great progress that has been made in the face of financial chaos. In September 1991 the governor of Massachusetts placed the city in receivership and appointed a receiver whose mandate was to cut costs. Many of those cuts were made at the expense of the Chelsea schools. In spite of this, Boston University chose to stay in Chelsea and work with the receiver to make the best use of the resources that were left. We also worked hard to raise additional funds from outside sources. In the first three years of the partnership, we raised $5 million from outside sources and donated more than $2 million in university funds and services to the Chelsea schools, while managing the school system on a pro bono basis.

Boo suggests that when Dr. John Silber, president of Boston University, attempted to speak to parents about the schools' financial problems a year ago he was "drowned out by jeers." The fact is that the jeers came from a group of firefighters who were protesting that the school budget had not been cut enough. Parents shouted down the jeering firefighters so that Silber could be heard.

The suggestion that Dr. Peter Greer, superintendent *ad interim* of the Chelsea schools and former dean of the Boston University School of Education, "took the hint" and left Chelsea because of parent opposition to the partnership is ludicrous. The fact is that when the first superintendent appointed under the partnership resigned to run for mayor of Boston, Greer agreed to take the position for one year while a national search for a new permanent superintendent was conducted.

Despite the financial crisis that all but closed the schools in 1991, we are making enormous progress and are proud of what we have accomplished. The partnership has tried to involve parents at every level and we recognize that more must be done to encourage participation from the parent population, many of whom are not used to participating in parent/teacher organizations and who have difficulty with English.

We are confident that the model for education reform being forged in Chelsea is one that is well worth emulating throughout the United States.

CAROL HILLMAN
Boston, Massachusetts
Ms. Hillman is vice president for university relations at Boston University.

Critical mess

In your article on nuclear power radiation ["Power Play," Christopher Georges, September], you appear to want to continue to hobble nuclear energy so that it cannot fairly compete with other forms of electricity production. No other technology comes close to the level of regulation imposed on nuclear power, even after licensing reform.

Prior to reform, the opportunities for stalling the start-up of a nuclear plant were numerous. Typically, it is not citizens who ask for hearings on a safety concern, but rather the lawyers for groups who make their living opposing nuclear technology. Their job is to find any excuse, big or small, to halt construction or operation of a plant, making it just too costly to bear for the utilities and the public.

It is this fundamental problem that licensing reform is meant to address. Considering that nuclear electricity does not create greenhouse gases or affect the ozone layer, the technology is becoming an increasingly attractive option for replacing fossil fuels. It just seems that requiring substantive evidence before forcing enormous financial losses on a public is a very reasonable thing to ask.

THEODORE M. BESMANN, PH. D.
Oak Ridge, Tennessee
Dr. Besmann is a research group leader at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

A kinder, gentler *Monthly*

Have I missed something? I thought *The Washington Monthly* was supposed to be an iconoclastic yet fundamentally liberal forum. But back in June, you had one right-winger, Susan Dentzer, plugging the work of another, Robert L. Bartley ["Bull Pulpit"]. In October, we were treated to Peggy Noonan ["Gettysburg Regress"], the genius who ranked the contras as moral equals to Washington and Jefferson. Why is such tripe appearing in the *Monthly*? Noonan complaining about the emptiness of modern political rhetoric is comparable to Madonna griping about too much sex on MTV. She writes, "Rarely has what politicians say been held in such low regard," which is true. Does she wonder why? Eight years of unadulterated lies and mindless garbage spewed out by Ronald Reagan—considerable portions thanks to her—might be part of the answer.

I won't make threats about dropping my subscription—there's nowhere else to go, and the bulk of the magazine (certainly "Tilting at Windmills") remains a joy to read—but I resent the fact that even a miniscule fraction of my subscription check goes to the likes of Peggy Noonan.

ROGER KEELING
Santa Cruz, California

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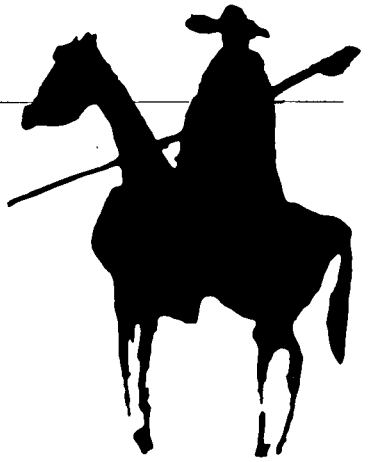
TILTING AT WINDMILLS



Your suspicion that rich people have different standards from the rest of us will be confirmed by the headline that their favorite publication, *The Wall Street Journal*, ran over a report that George Bush's retirement income will be $577,000 a year: "Comfortable, Not Lavish." . . .

For the last decade, the nuclear power industry and the federal government have been assuring the people of Nevada that the nuclear waste dump planned for Yucca Mountain would be absolutely safe, even in the event of an earthquake. Not to worry, the feds and the industry chorused, there hadn't been a quake in the area in 10,000 years. Well, you guessed it: This year, an earthquake registering 5.6 on the Richter scale blew out the windows of the Energy Department's office building at the site, collapsed its ceilings, and cracked its elevator shaft. . . .

Chrysler boasts that its new Concorde ushers in "the renaissance of the American car." The only catch is that the cars are assembled in Canada with 28 percent non-American parts. . . .

The scene is a mountain ranch in California. Several armed men crash through the door. The rancher's wife screams, "Please don't shoot me! Don't kill me!" Her husband, who had been sleeping in the next room, seizes his gun and rushes to protect her. The men shout, "Put down the gun!" As the husband's arm drops, he is shot twice in the chest and dies instantly.

The killers were drug enforcement agents. They had a search warrant based on the suspicion that they would find a large supply of marijuana in the ranch house. They found none. Of course, the rancher would have been better off without a gun, but just think how many times you've read stories of violent forced entry during a drug search which led to gunplay in which one or more people were wounded or killed, all on the basis of the suspicion of the nonviolent crime of possessing drugs. . . .

Congressional salaries will automatically rise to $133,644 in January. We got stuck with these automatic raises through the time-honored legislative device of subsuming them in a bill the title of which, the Ethics Reform Act of 1989, not only gave no hint of the mischief it concealed but reeked of high-mindedness. The National Taxpayers Union (NTU) is trying to enjoin this raise in the federal courts on the grounds that the 27th Amendment—the one drafted by James Madison in 1789 but not ratified until last May—provides that "no law varying the compensation for the services of the Senator or Representative shall take effect until an election of Representatives shall have intervened." Since President Bush issued the executive order authorizing the raise before November 3, the NTU seems to have a pretty good case. But my guess is that the federal judiciary will rule otherwise. The reason is that, on the issue of pay raises, the judges and congressmen are allied under the great banner of More is Better. . . .

The 435 members of the House of Representatives *each* spent an average of $171,809 of your money on franked mail from January 1991 to September 1992. This burdened the postal system with roughly 500 million pieces of mail. This just doesn't make sense. Why not eliminate franked mass mailings and use the frank privilege only for replies to

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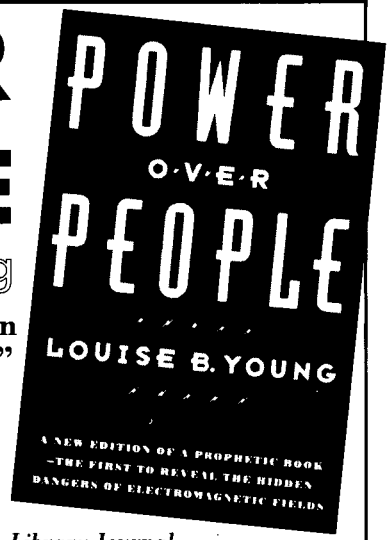

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constituent letters and correspondence between congressmen and other government officials? . . .

I agree with Susan Threadgill (see "Who's Who," page 18) that the director of OMB is the most important appointment that Bill Clinton will make. The big challenge for whomever gets the job is figuring out a better system for monitoring which government programs are working and which are not. (For a look at Richard Darman's failings in this regard, see "What the Smartest Man in Washington Doesn't Understand. And Why it Will Hurt You," Jason DeParle, November 1989.) Next in importance is the person who will serve as Clinton's chief of staff, who, incidentally, I would not call chief of staff because the title tends to make the incumbent put on airs and think he should be on talk shows. The ideal person for the job was Ken O'Donnell who performed it, without title and with a proper passion for anonymity, under John Kennedy. The essential characteristic he brought to his role was the ability to inspire confidence in both JFK and administration officials that O'Donnell could be trusted to deliver messages accurately, with good sense about what should take priority and without any input of self-interest that might distort content. Bill Moyers also played the role of unofficial chief of staff during LBJ's most successful years, 1963–65

The third most important job is head of the Office of Personnel Management. This will surprise the ambitious power people who are currently vying for plum assignments in the new administration, and who could not imagine writing back to Mom about the thrill of working in personnel. But the decline in quality of the civil service over the past 25 years has been dramatic. James Q. Wilson says the civil service is "in a death spiral." Attracting better bureaucrats must rank high among Bill Clinton's priorities. . . .

My favorite retirement program is the one for Air Force chimpanzees. These veterans of the space program cost $37,000 each to maintain through their golden years. . . .

Speaking of space, the latest foolishness from NASA was the space shuttle *Columbia* launch in October. Its cost will be in the neighborhood of a billion dollars. For what? To launch an Italian satellite, the equivalent of which we sent into space in 1976, at a tiny fraction of the cost of the *Columbia* mission, in an unmanned Delta rocket. Not only was the money for the *Columbia* launch wasted pointlessly, but the lives of the astronauts were needlessly put at risk. Remember, the chance for catastrophic failure on these missions is one in seventy-eight. . . .

Outpatient clinics have found a new way to bilk their Medicare patients by billing the patient's share as a percentage of its inflated "list" price rather than of the Medicare-approved cost. So, to take one example offered by the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, a California patient who paid 20 percent of the clinic's list price of $7,314 for therapy for a pinched nerve had to fork over $1,462.80 to the clinic. If he had been charged 20 percent of the Medicare-approved price, which was $2,917.15, he would have had to pay only $594.23. . . .

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If that doesn't convince you of the need for tougher government regulation of all the bandits out there masquerading as respectable professionals and businessmen, I offer one more example: A recent study reported in the British medical journal, *The Lancet*, found that a five-year delay in requiring warning labels on aspirin led to the needless deaths of 1,470 children from Reye's syndrome. . . .

When someone tries to convince you that decentralization will automatically produce better government, you would be wise to find out how much he knows about local government. If the federal government is bad, then state, county, and municipal governments are usually worse. Consider Ventura County in California, which was recently investigated by the *Los Angeles Times*, where 13 administrators were found to have padded their salaries by a total of $190,000 in just one year. One technique officials—who get up to 11 weeks of vacation and sick leave time—used was to legally sell back up to five weeks of that time to the county. All 13 got a $6,000 annual car allowance plus 27 cents for each mile they drove on county business. This is on top of a base pay that ranged from $79,274 to $112,008.

In another California county, *The San Jose Mercury News* found that officials had cut $37 million from essential services while refusing to cut a cent from the $10 million paid each year to the top 120 of those same officials. . . .

More than one in four trucks inspected on Maryland and Virginia highways are found to have defective brakes, lights, and other safety features. I begin to sweat when one of these giants comes near me on the Beltway. With good reason: The national inspection rate is even worse. According to *The Washington Post*, one in three inspected trucks has some defect. The catch is that far too few trucks are inspected meaning that only a handful of offenders are actually caught and taken off the road. . . .

Can you believe the Bush administration wants to add to the danger by permitting truck drivers to drive 100 hours in an eight-day period instead of the 70 hours currently allowed? . . .

It may be time to revive our column devoted to the Worst City Government, an honor that had clearly been earned by the District of Columbia before we decided to declare a moratorium as a courtesy to new mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly. The reason, however, goes beyond Kelly's inclination to devote more effort to increasing her vacation time than to increasing the efficiency of the D.C. government: Recently, two D.C. cops were arrested after three witnesses said the officers had robbed them at gunpoint. Thirty other members of the D.C. police department are under indictment for other crimes.

At about the same time, a D.C. Superior Court judge was protecting the public by sentencing the killer of a cabdriver to just six years in prison. There was no doubt that the defendant had shot the cabbie while robbing him. At the time of the offense, the defendant had a record of prior arrests and was an escapee from a penal facility. . . .

Sometimes it seems that the American judiciary is split between conservative Republicans who want to send all criminals to the electric chair and liberal

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Democrats who want to give probation to the vilest murderers. Why can't we free ourselves from these knee-jerk responses to crime and adopt a rational policy of being tough on the violent and tender on the first-time, nonviolent offender, except in cases involving betrayal of trust by such people as public officials and savings and loan executives. . . .

One of the cruelest and dumbest prejudices of the American meritocracy is its bias in favor of credentialism. What really counts is performance, but our educated elite wants test scores and degrees to be the markers of success instead. So in Elyria, Ohio, a middle school teacher who was also the wrestling coach, and whose talent at both jobs was vouched for by 60 parents, was fired because he didn't have a teaching certificate or the right degree. But the most absurd example of credentialism gone amok has to be the case of Robert E. Caron. Caron is the EPA official whose actual expertise has never been questioned but who had lied about his credentials. He was the EPA's expert witness in a number of important cases that the agency won against corporate polluters. Now the cases are being thrown out—not because there is a shred evidence that Caron's testimony was wrong, but because he didn't have the degrees he claimed. . . .

I learned my first lesson in the silliness of the meritocrats when I was working in the theater in the late forties and early fifties. Again and again I encountered obviously padded resumés claiming Broadway and Hollywood credits that even the moderately suspicious would view with skepticism. But what I learned was that the insecurities that produced the false claims were irrelevant to the main question which was, "Does the person have the talent to play the part, dance the steps, sing the songs, or direct or choreograph this company?" To find out what you really wanted to know, you conducted auditions and talked to respected friends who had witnessed their performances. If only the people doing the hiring would learn this lesson. Unfortunately, only those who work in the worlds of sports and the performing arts have done so. . . .

During the debates, a questioner asked about the health of the Pension Benefits Guaranty Corp., the government agency that insures private pension plans. George Bush seemed totally uninformed about the agency but said, don't worry, it's backed by the credit of the United States government. This should have chilled you with the memory of similar reassurances about the savings and loans. Just as the depositors were bailed out then, the pension plans may have to be bailed out soon. And that means you and I will be stuck with the bill. With slippery corporate manipulators like Carl Icahn maneuvering to escape liability for employee pensions, I would guess that the chances we'll be stuck are pretty good. . . .

I have long contended that, next to threatening to cut an agency's budget which might lead to bureaucrats losing their jobs, the issue surest to arouse passion in the bureaucratic breast is parking places. The latest illustration of this comes from FEMA, where last year, according to Knight-Ridder's Frank Greve, "parking came to absorb its leaders. After much debate, they spent $225,000 to subsidize headquarters parking and drop the monthly rate from $137 to $20." . . .

Did you see Nat Hentoff's column about the crazies who shouted down Robert Casey, the governor of Pennsylvania, when he attempted to speak recently in New York on the subject of "How a Liberal Can be Pro-Life"? Hentoff, who was the moderator, started by saying the event was about free speech—Casey would give his position and the audience would then have the chance to question and argue with him. Instead, the pro-choicers began "hooting, screaming, pounding, and whistling." I continue to think that extremists on both sides of the abortion issue present a grave danger to the social sanity of this republic. I am pro-choice but I understand why many wise and caring people worry about abortion on demand and want to find some way at least to encourage the woman involved to reflect on the choice she is making. There is a middle ground of common sense and humanity on which both sides of the abortion debate should try to meet instead of behaving like hysterical Nazis. . . .

Let's hear one hand clapping for Ross Perot. If he weren't a paranoid egomaniac, he would be a great man. Let's hope someone else comes along, who doesn't have Perot's more bizarre qualities but who does have the common sense and candor that I think Americans yearn to find in their leaders. To me, the most important lesson of Perot's campaign—one that I pray Bill Clinton absorbs—is that Perot attracted the most support when he was the most honest about the country's problems. . . .

—*Charles Peters*

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MEMO OF THE MONTH

FEDERAL RESERVE statistical release

SPECIAL NOTICE

Because of the Veterans Day holiday next Wednesday, this release will be published on Friday, November 13, instead of on Thursday, November 12. It will be issued on Thursday, November 19, its usual publication date, but will be delayed the following week until Friday, November 27 because of the Thanksgiving Day holiday on Thursday, November 26.

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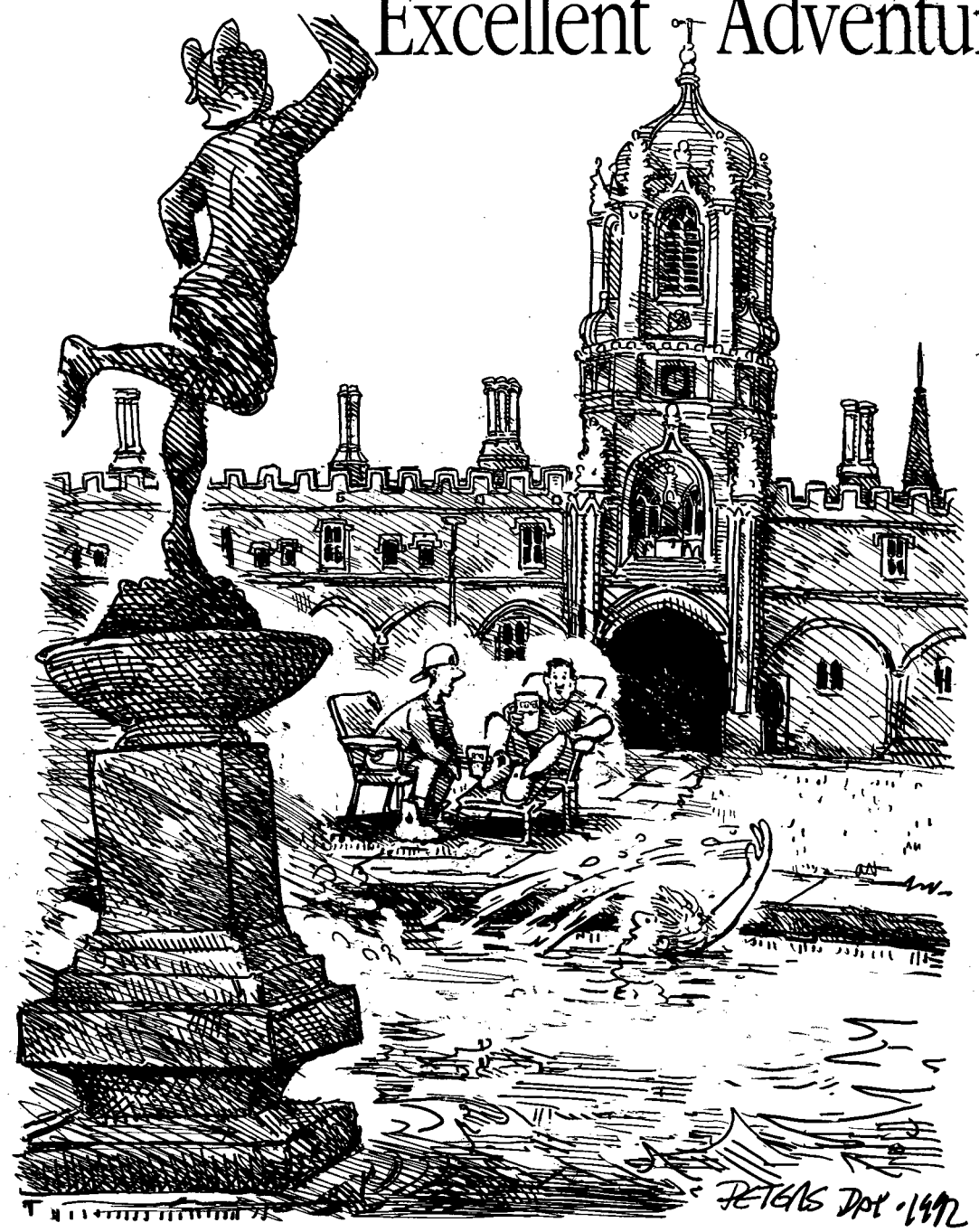
Bill and Friends' Excellent Adventure

Rhodes Scholars may know a lot. But they didn't learn it at Oxford



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arrival of a whole slew of Oxonians at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue have only increased the cachet and glamour of the gothic spires. From the regents and dons of the university you could almost hear the happy tinkling of sherry glasses toasting a new generation of the best and the brightest in the White House: economic advisors Robert Reich, Ira Magaziner, and Saul Benjamin, and young turks George Stephanapolous, Bill Halter, Atul Gawande, and Bruce Reed. Post-graduate stints at Oxford were the favored path of success for upstart politicos and the overly ambitious long before Clinton ever set foot on British soil, and long before the two Supreme Court justices and five senators now toiling in Washington got their Oxford sheepskins. But more than ever, a two or three year jaunt to the Mother Country is the confirmed ticket to punch now that the university has finally sent an entire crew to the varsity team.

"Oxford! The very sight of the word printed or sound of it spoken, is fraught with most actual magic," says Max Beerbohm's narrator in *Zuleika Dobson*, and you can't blame him. It is hard to argue with Oxford's beauty, its mystique (just ask George Bush), or its track record in producing scholars, politicians, and entertainers of world-class caliber. Oxford, after all, gave us Adam Smith, Shelley, Samuel Johnson, Oscar Wilde, Graham Greene, penicillin, and one third of Monty Python.

The school has also produced its share of American luminaries. But our national crush on Oxford has less to do with its alumni than with our Bridesheadish image of the place: its aura of tweedy erudition, its dewy green fields, gargoyles frowning from the turrets of medieval buildings, and all those pipe-smoking lads in white pants and thick sweaters debating the merits of Gibbon and Eliot. But like a lot of crushes, this one is partially founded on misconceptions. As I discovered during my own two years there in '88 and '89, our hoary vision of Oxford contains some kernels of truth. But I also learned what my friend Tracy

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already knew: To the extent that a university's reputation is derived from the quality of education it provides, Oxford is overrated. And most Americans studying there couldn't care less. For them, the main challenge is finding ways to stay amused. With its star rising as fast as its most famous alum, the time has come for an unsentimental look beyond the myths.

Don yawn

The heart of the Oxford education—for British undergraduates and for the many American grad students who do two-year versions of undergrad degrees—is the tutorial system. It sounds at first like the perfect antidote to America's overstuffed and impersonal lecture halls: lock yourself in a room with a learned prof and go mano-a-mano for an hour on the topic of the week. The session begins with the reading of an essay you have written, leaving the bulk of the time for chin-stroking and discussion. At the end of the hour, your don offers up a new subject, a list of books to pore over, and sends you off to write another cogent synthesis of another topic. It sounds great, and sometimes it is. With a dedicated don and a curious student, it's hard to conceive of a more intense learning experience. Some Oxford alums get downright soggy recalling individual tutorials.

But as the ferret story makes clear, without a committed teacher this system is a hopeless disaster. "There's nothing like tutorial teaching when both sides take it seriously," says Alan Ryan, a former Oxford don now a professor of politics at Princeton. "If they don't, then it's the idlest and least efficient system there is." Ryan learned this firsthand when he arrived at Oxford's New College and found that one of his colleagues had been marching off to a bar with students after listening to their essays and nodding vague, unhelpful approvals. "These chaps were all absolute tabulae rasae when I got ahold of them," says Ryan.

Every Oxford student has at least one good variation on the distracted don theme; dons who slinked under a rug, skimmed the newspaper, or—my personal favorite—sat and shaved with an electric razor while students read out their essays. Most common, not surprisingly, are dons who snooze. Developing strategies to keep sleepers awake was generally half the fun of their tutorials, the trick being to keep the guy upright without letting on that you know he's falling asleep. This was a special challenge with the most narcoleptically inclined of them, a nearly retired politics don who could scarcely keep his eyes open in classes after 3 p.m. Reading at twice the ordinary decibel level was one strategy; fluctuating between a soft and loud voice was another. But neither was foolproof. A friend of mine finally dreamed up an ingenious technique. At the beginning of every sentence, he would state the name of this teacher: "Mr. Smith, Hume's analysis of the problem of causation raises some baffling questions. Mr. Smith. . . ." The don felt obliged to politely nod back at every mention of his name, which kept him awake.

During term, students have just two one-hour tutorials a week to attend and there are no mandatory lectures. Ostensibly they are off devouring books and scribbling essays the rest of their time. But they're not. Now, Oxford is no different than other schools around the world in being rife with undergrads who'd rather cavort than dissect Hegel, but the British system seems to encourage would-be scholars to choose the bars over the books. For one thing, students don't actually hand in their essays, they just read them out. The difference is vast. You'd be amazed at how easy it is to cobble together a couple of pertinent facts, cull insights from secondary sources and wing the transition sentences once you get to class. If you're feeling particularly lethargic, near-by bookstores offer plenty for the student in need of a quick precis that can be easily paraphrased into an original essay.

And while the American system tries to keep minds focused by grading constantly, Oxford's students are not evaluated with a mark that matters until two weeks before they leave the place for good. (There are college-wide tests at the start of each term called "collections," but they're primarily used to signal looming disasters.) In sum, the essays are not graded, lectures are optional, and there's no exam to sweat at the end of term.

Pint of lager, please.

Hard work is not only unnecessary, it's essentially frowned upon. Wanting to excel, striving for high marks on collections, even heady discussions are subtly tsk-tsked as indecorous. "Dining hall talk was not supposed to be about Plato," says one Rhodes Scholar, there in the eighties. "Oxford places the emphasis on fluency and glibness. Serious discussions are not encouraged." If you end up with a high mark at the end of your years, fine, but wanting to do well and applying yourself is deemed off-putting. At Balliol, the college that I attended, this ethic was semi-officially codified as "effortless superiority." Lots of the American students—most of whom had been hyper-industrious undergraduates—had a hard time adjusting to Oxford's too-clever-to-care chic and devised ways to study on the sly.

You can trace this culture of cool detachment to the British secondary schooling system. By the time English students are 15 they are already winnowing down which subjects they will major in for the rest of

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their years in school, and they are accepted into college to study one subject—and only one subject—as undergrads. Their advantage is that they get to dig deeper in a narrow field and develop an expertise. The drawback is, they're bored. The academe becomes something like a salad bar where you can only help yourself to the beans—which tends to make you very cynical about beans and sick of salad bars in general. The standard rap against American education is that it's superficial and next to the British system, it's guilty as charged. But while the smattering approach to the curriculum may not lend itself to penetrating thought, it has the advantage of keeping the enthusiasm level high.

"Irony is an almost mandatory part of the British education," says Simon Schama, a former Oxford don, now teaching at Harvard. "There's almost no irony in American education. American students believe there's an answer to everything. British students believe there are no answers to anything. This prepares the British student to be indifferent to just about anything other than having a good time."

And have a good time they do. So do the Americans. In fact, the hard part for U.S. students is figuring out how to spend the day. One Marshall scholar I knew at Oxford described his daily regimen this way: "Wake up at noon. Noon to one, lunch. One to two-thirty, hang around and play guitar. Two-thirty to four, nap. Four to five-thirty, exercise. Six to eight, dinner. Eight to nine, do some work. Nine to eleven, hang around and play guitar. Eleven to three in the morning, television." One group of U.S. students in the late eighties was so bored that they decided to keep their watches—and their lives—set to American time for one entire term. They blackened their windows with curtains and towels and were essentially nocturnal for eight solid weeks, eating dinner right around breakfast time and getting to sleep by noon.

Those not addled by tedium have a blast. George Will may remember his time at Magdalene College, as he did in a 1991 column, for fervid discussions about Stigler and the virtues of the Chicago school of economics. But Massachusetts Governor William Weld's rendering of life at Oxford sounds more like the norm to me. A *New York Times Magazine* profile explained that for Weld, Oxford was "lager and chocolates, poker games and parties without end, 10 sets of tennis every afternoon, played on grass courts so no one ever got tired."

That's when school is in session. Most of the time, Oxford's students are on vacation. The English school year is divided into three terms of eight weeks with a six-week break between terms and a 16-week summer vacation. That's eight weeks on, six off, eight on, six off, another eight on and then it's summertime. The "vacs" as they are known, are intended as reading periods to bone up on the last term's work and prepare for what's ahead. I've heard about Brits who put this time to productive use—but I can't say I ever met one. For Americans, vacs were travel time, a chance to explore Europe, the Middle East or—like Clinton—Russia. Oxford alums knew immediately that the university's leisurely schedule, not communist skulduggery, was behind the incoming president's 1969 trip to Moscow.

"My main impression was just how easy it was," said one Rhodes who attended Oxford shortly after Clinton, and "there's a sort of a conspiracy of silence not to reveal this."

Nigellian tables

Oxford's dons, by contrast, are overworked. In fact, the more you know about their schedules, the harder it is to begrudge them their naps. Typically they have 15 hours of tutorials a week, plus lectures to prepare and deliver, plus a wide range of administrative duties that includes everything from screening next year's incoming class to running the college's investment portfolio. "I didn't hope to do any work on my own during the term," says Amartya Sen, a renowned economist who used to teach at Oxford and was lured away by Harvard five years ago. "At one point I was teaching 12 tutorials a week and lecturing and reading papers. It all adds up to a hell of a lot of hours." It also adds up to a great deal of brain-glazing repetition. For scholars who would rather be trailblazing in their fields, listening closely to the 400th student effort to define negative and positive liberty isn't easy. The more mischievous of the undergrads at Balliol knew this and made a game of deciding over breakfast which totally inappropriate phrase they would all try to slip by their dons that week. My favorite was "the last train to Vladivostok," which was somehow woven into a number of essays, apparently without eliciting any comment.

For all their travails, Britain's teachers are paid sums that would make their U.S. equivalents blush. Senior lecturers who have put in a few decades of service can now expect to pull in roughly $45,000, exactly half of the published average salary of a Princeton professor. And though Oxford was the spawning ground for *The Wealth of Nations*, it apparently has a visceral aversion to free-market forces. Publish an academe-rattling treatise on quantum physics or wile away your days shaving, if you're a British scholar it won't affect your bottom line. Aside from winning a promotion to a professorship—awarded by the university biannually, two dozen or

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The Washington Monthly

JOURNALISM AWARD

FOR SEPTEMBER 1992 IS PRESENTED TO

Bob Davis
The Wall Street Journal

New twists to the time-tested bureaucratic debacle genre of journalism are hard to come by, but we loved the irony of this *Wall Street Journal* piece which argues that the agency charged with digging communities out of earthquakes and hurricanes is—what else?—a disaster. The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) troubles came into sharp focus in the wake of Hurricane Andrew, when the agency spent the first several days sorting out agency directives and studying up on the cultural quirks of Dade County. But the authors of this article make clear that FEMA's woes go well beyond its miserable showing in Florida. It's beset by infighting, populated with 10 times the number of political appointees found in other agencies—few of whom have any experience in disaster relief—and typically lumbers into action well after its good works are most needed. Lawrence Korb, formerly a member of FEMA's advisory board, has a sensible solution: Scrap the entire $800-million agency and transfer its responsibilities to the Pentagon.

The Monthly Journalism Award is presented each month to the best newspaper, magazine, television, or radio story (or series of stories) on our political system. Nominations for any newspaper, magazine, or radio or television station in the country are welcome. The subject can be government in its federal, state, or municipal manifestation. Please send nominations to Monthly Journalism Award, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009. Two copies of the article or broadcast text should accompany the nomination.

Nominations for stories published or aired in December will close January 15. The winner will be announced in the April issue.

so at a time—living another year is the only way to get a raise.

Government-imposed penury and the school's devotion to an inflexible pay scale have had an inevitable effect. Since the eighties, Oxford has been losing heavy-weight scholars at a dizzying rate and many of its departments can boast only negligible fractions of the talent they used to have. Oxford, for instance, was the center of the known universe for philosophers in the late seventies. Now that the likes of Simon Blackburn, Colin McGinn, Steven Lukes, John McDowell, and others have departed for the United States and elsewhere, the philosophy department is unremarkable.

To some extent, the quality of the Oxford education doesn't matter. The British, like many other societies, tend to look at college as a seasoning experience rather than a career-making or breaking one. Securing a spot at Oxford, in a system that allows barely 2 percent of teenagers to get a university education, is most of the battle. As long as Oxonians don't founder miserably once there, they are well positioned for the plunge back into the real world. The rare over-eager types and those interested in a career in academia are inclined to work hard, but otherwise there's little reason to break a sweat, at least until final exams come along.

Americans on scholarships tend to be monumental slouches for different reasons. The important achievement for those who land one of these free rides is the scholarship itself, and neither the Rhodes Trust nor the administrators of the Marshall Scholarship get particularly anguished about their wards kicking back and enjoying the scenery once they've arrived. Lots of Rhodes and Marshalls don't even bother getting degrees at Oxford (Clinton didn't), and many others scrape by with what are called "thirds," degrees that in this country roughly translate into two years of straight "D"s. (Bill Bradley got a third and has joked ever since that he received "the third highest" mark at Oxford).

So if Oxford is overrated, who cares? Not the students. And not the eager consumers, in this country and others, of its Jeremy Irons elegance. Old World gravitas is what we want from Oxford and it's got that in spades. It's also got a name that can't be beat, a credential that looks swell on the résumé. But before Clinton wannabes decide they need that Oxford experience, they should know what they are getting into. Heed the words of one of the prime purveyors of Oxford nostalgia, Evelyn Waugh. In a letter to a friend while an undergraduate, Waugh summed up the situation succinctly: "Life here is very beautiful. Mayonnaise and punts and cider cups all day long. One loses all ambition to be an intellectual." □

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First Choice

Why Chelsea Clinton should attend a public school

by Deborah Fallows

When Bill and Hillary Clinton move to the White House in January, they'll face a personal decision that confronts any relocated family: Where should their child go to school? They're not likely to hear my pitch—that they should send Chelsea to a public school in the metropolitan area—from many of their friends who live in Washington, D.C.

The Gores send their children to private school. So do the Quayles. So does Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander. In fact, none of the 67 top education policymakers in the Bush administration sends his or her kids to D.C. public schools. Instead, the Clintons will be hearing well-deserved praise of the academics at the National Cathedral School, of the sincere service ethics of Quaker philosophy at Sidwell Friends School, of the respect for individualism at Georgetown Day School, among others.

Most of the D.C. public schools near the White House may look like unreasonable choices to the Clintons. Chelsea's new neighborhood public school would be Francis Junior High. The students at Francis are thoroughly excited by the prospect of having Chelsea enrolled with them and the Clintons can be sure she would be warmly welcomed there. Academically, Francis is not as strong as Thomas Jefferson Junior High School, which is less than a mile from the White House in Southeast Washington. Jefferson ranks first in the city in math scores for ninth-graders and is the recipient of a million-dollar sponsorship from COMSAT to boost its math and science programs. Unfortunately, Jefferson has virtually no white students. It is one thing for parents to value an integrated environment for their children, as the Clintons have done in sending Chelsea to public schools in Little Rock. It is

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something else, and less fair to any child, black or white, to put her in a situation where she constitutes such a tiny minority.

Academically as good as Jefferson but more diverse are Deal Junior High School, Hardy Middle School, and Wilson High School, all of which are within two or three miles of the White House. These three schools are integrated, academically strong, and reasonable choices for parents who value public schools but also don't want their child to be a pawn for their beliefs. Chelsea can get a solid public school education without being turned into a martyr.

SATisfaction guaranteed

Recommending public school in Washington, D.C., throws a block that stops most parents in their tracks. Over the years, these are some of the comments I've heard most: "I wouldn't consider it for *my* children"; "we don't want to sacrifice our children to political principles"; "we bailed out after a few years." From the other side, there is a similar tone: "private school wimps"; "spoiled rich kids"; "no confidence in their own children." When I suggested to editors at *The Washington Post* an article recommending that Chelsea go to public schools, the response was immediate: "We have zero interest in this idea." It is one of those issues, like the conflict between working and non-working mothers, that most people who are on opposite sides just can't discuss, even with good friends.

What these polarized opinions overlook is that there are reasonable possibilities open to the Clintons. Consider Deal Junior High in Northwest Washington, where of the 950 students in grades seven through nine, half are black, about a quarter white, the remainder mostly Hispanic and Asian. Deal offers six foreign languages: French, Spanish, Latin, Chinese, German, and Russian. Some eighth grade students study with a humanities team that packages English, history, art, and music. There are sports ranging from football to golf to fencing. There is a chorus, a gospel choir, glee club, band, orchestra, ski club, and much more. Hardy Middle School is smaller and therefore has fewer programs than Deal, but its program is strong enough that the Carter family chose to send Amy there. Graduates of both Deal and Hardy eventually move to Woodrow Wilson High School, next door to Deal. Year-in and year-out, Wilson produces National Merit semi-finalists and sends graduates to Ivy League schools.

For the D.C. school system as a whole, security is a problem. In some schools like Eastern High School near RFK stadium, students (but not visitors) must pass through metal detectors and have their bookbags checked. At others, like Hart Junior High in Southeast Washington, a security guard sits with a sign-in register at the front door. The shooting by an outsider at Wilson High School four years ago proved to be an isolated incident rather than an example of frequent violence.

At schools like Hardy, Deal, and Wilson, crime and physical safety are not serious worries. But, because of the spillover from the system-wide watchfulness about security, students even at these schools can't hang around after school if they don't have business there.

Each family makes its decisions about schools based on a variety of complex factors. The Clintons may feel that, on balance, the D.C. public schools are not right for Chelsea. When my family returned from living in Asia, that is how we felt for our children. Our son wanted to continue studying the language he had struggled to learn in Japanese public school, and while the public schools in D.C. didn't offer Japanese, one in Maryland did. The Clintons, no doubt, have complicated factors of their own to balance. But they have the option, which we chose, of staying in the public system by sending Chelsea to public school in Montgomery County. They would be hard-pressed to find better public schools anywhere. The middle schools in Montgomery County feed into some of the best high schools in the nation. Students who live in D.C. can attend schools in Maryland, and students who live in Maryland can go to schools in D.C., if their parents pay the equivalent of the system's per-student annual spending.

Are these suburban public schools just private schools in disguise? That is what many private-school parents seem to think, but you can't believe that if you have spent any time in the schools. Even in an area like Montgomery County, which is wealthy by national standards, the student population is varied in a way unlike private schools. There are physically and mentally disabled children, whom the school is legally obliged to serve. There are children who have just arrived from other parts of the world—Asia, Latin America, Africa, Europe—and cannot speak English but whom the school must legally include. There are the chronic "discipline problems." There are students who don't plan to go to college. And yet, the school must accept them. It cannot reject students who are discipline problems or who might bring down the SAT average. This inability to screen the student population makes virtually any public school better reflect America than most private schools. It also means that students must cope with variety and unpredictability. Obviously most suburban schools can escape the problems of crime and poverty that overwhelm much of the D.C. sys-

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tem, but they are still "public" in a meaningful way. And if "tuition" is to be spent by the Clintons, why not spend it on a public school?

Curriculum vital

From a purely political perspective, selecting a public school for their daughter would be a sure, swift, and positive step for the Clintons. It would send the message that they firmly believe in public education and are committed to improving it. At the same time, it would provide a boost of confidence to public school teachers and administrators across the nation. It would also avoid a terrible symbolic problem. If Chelsea winds up in a private school, it would take Newt Gingrich about five minutes to point out that "Bill Clinton wants to deny poor people the right to choose private schools for their children, even though that's what he has chosen himself." The logic might not be perfect, but the symbolism would hurt.

Of course, the Clintons' decision has to involve more than political calculation. Like other parents, they have to think first about what is best for their daughter. They have demonstrated that they are a strong, solid family and that they respect each other and their unity. They know that Chelsea will be spending six to eight hours a day, for at least the next four years of her life, in one of these schools being shaped by its values and environment. She will follow her studies, make her friends, form her teen-age impressions about American life in that school. There are strong reasons why a public school should be in the running, not only because it might be good for their daughter and good for their family, but excellent for the nation.

How so? First, sending their daughter to public school would allow the Clintons to do something that is clearly very important to all of them—stay connected with the American people. They are connected in Arkansas, where Chelsea attends public school; they stayed connected during the campaign, through their bus tours and town meetings. Public school would be consistent and fitting with their life, and it would be one of the few avenues left open to them to maintain their real-world connections.

The connection that public school offers is compelling: Children bring home to their parents the concerns facing the schools, large and small, from classroom incidents to system-wide issues. They bring home their impressions of friends and classmates, their families, and teachers—the sense of the community of the school they attend. The problems facing our nation's schools would be brought directly into the living quarters of the White House on the first day Chelsea had one of Washington D.C.'s teacher-furlough holidays.

The principle would apply even if she went to the suburban schools, because these schools are also grappling with the basic issues of how America educates its children. In the face of budget cuts in the past few years, Montgomery County schools have eliminated cost of living pay-raises for teachers and cut athletic expenditures and most all-day kindergarten programs. The county has continuing debates about eliminating class periods, increasing class size, and reducing support staff. The Clintons don't have to be connected to the most troubled school system to be connected to the public-school predicament as a whole.

Second, parents and educators alike know that one of the important ways schools either stay good or get better is through parental involvement. We can all say we are concerned about America's public education. Even Dan Quayle bragged about his public school background when he got the chance. But as busy people, we all know that we care with our hearts more deeply and act with our hands, our time, and our wallets in the schools to which we have entrusted our own children. This is only human, and it is as true of the Clintons as it is of my next door neighbors. As first parents, the Clintons have an enormous opportunity to influence their own daughter's school, as well as set the example for America's parents.

Realistically, we all know that Chelsea will receive the best of whichever school they choose— the best teachers, the best classes. The Clintons, especially Hillary, with her interest and experience in education unleashed, can push for some of the best for the rest of America's children along the way. She can do everything from talking about caring for schools to promoting curriculum changes (like more foreign language study), to insisting on teaching standards and rewards for teaching excellence, to raising student performance standards, to encouraging better textbooks, athletic programs, and more student public service, to addressing issues of "values" which are increasingly wedging their way into academic life.

Chelsea Clinton herself will take with her to whatever school she attends a sense of specialness. It will be "the school where the President's daughter goes." She will be all right, and her school will be all right, just because she goes there. What is exciting is the message this could carry to the rest of the schools in the nation. This is a chance, perhaps, to build a Peace Corps-like zeal about public schools. They are at a good enough starting point, there is good raw material to work with, and there is a good chance for improvement. □

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WHO'S WHO

Some of those closest to **Bill Clinton** are worried about the near total absence of eloquence in his public addresses. Even such all-important and could-have-been-carefully-prepared speeches are lacking, such as the acceptance speech at the convention and the victory speech on election night. About the only exception during the campaign was his September 11 speech at Notre Dame, which Senator **Harris Wofford** is said to have had a hand in drafting. Maybe the president-elect should ask Wofford to help out with the inaugural address. . . .

Other campaign insiders are mystified as to what impressed **Bill Clinton** about **Vernon Jordan**'s track record as a leader of transitions. His previous such assignment was directing the transition of D.C. mayor **Sharon Pratt Kelly**, whose administration got off to a faltering start from which it has never recovered. Jordan, by the way, is said to have one notable personal characteristic in common with the president-elect. Guess what it is. . . .

Two officials of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp. have had the courage to take on **Carl Icahn** in order to keep him from wriggling out of liability for the pensions of TWA employees. They are Director **James Lockhart** and his chief negotiator, **Diane Burkley**. . . .

Viewers were left shaking their heads after the November 7 edition of "Inside Washington." Had **Charles Krauthammer** really said that he thought **Arlen Specter** had "acted correctly" in the **Anita Hill** hearings? Does Krauthammer believe that an unsubstantiated charge of perjury is correct behavior? . . .

Craig Fuller is being blamed for the disastrous Republican convention in Houston last summer. . . .

What does *The New York Times* know that the rest of America doesn't? While **Bill Clinton** says domestic economic recovery will be the primary target of his administration, the *Times* has assigned its foreign affairs star, **Thomas Friedman**, to cover the White House. Speaking of the press, the winner of the 1992 Clinton Campaign Sycophant Award—despite some stiff competition— is *The New Republic*'s **Sydney Blumenthal**. . . .

An important indication of whether **Bill Clinton** is ready for the job he is about to take will be seen in who he names to succeed **Richard Darman** at the OMB. If there is one key job in the executive branch other than president, this is it. **Jimmy Carter** first revealed his ignorance of what he was getting into when he selected **Bert Lance** to fill it. . . .

When **Donald Regan** was secretary of the treasury and later White House chief of staff under **Ronald Reagan**, he was notorious for insisting upon and enjoying his own Secret Service detail, particularly for the Hail-to-the-Chief bustle it created as he made his entrances. Another Treasury official, **Peter K. Nunez**, who, as the department's assistant secretary for enforcement, is supposed to be its top cop, is said to possess a similar weakness. For example, **Jack Anderson** and **Michael Binstein** have found that on three separate trips to Chicago, Nunez was escorted by several Customs agents to various events, including one to a Blackhawks game and two others to watch the White Sox. . . .

All over Washington, lobbyists are busy making calls similar to those made by **David Steiner**, president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, to a contributor: "We have a dozen people in [**Bill Clinton**'s] headquarters, and they're all going to get jobs. I'll tell you I have friends on the Clinton campaign, close associates."

Unfortunately for Steiner, *The Washington Times* obtained a tape of the conversation and he had to resign. But he was only different from the other fellows around town in that his claim was too bald. A man like **Clark Clifford** in his prime would never have been so obvious, yet he would have gotten the same message across. And, most important of all, he wouldn't have gotten caught. . . .

Many here hope that among all the bright young **George Stephanopoulos**-types that will be populating the White House staff, **Bill Clinton** chooses at least one seasoned and principled anchor of wisdom such as **Bruce Babbitt**. . . .

—*Susan Threadgill*

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Hoax Populi

If we love populist leaders so much, why don't we ever elect one?

by David Shipley

Nineteen ninety two was going to be different. This was the year Americans were going to ditch the professional politicians. After all, look what the pros did to us four years ago.

It didn't turn out that way, of course. Though Ross Perot won nearly 20 percent of the popular vote, the presidential election came down to a choice between two Big Leaguers who'd played politics nearly all their adult lives. Still, our thwarted hunt for a populist leader was important, not because of the true heroes it turned up—none—but because it brought us face to face with what we were really seeking: our own presence in the political process.

The national mythology rests on the blithe conviction that amateurs can run a democracy. We can pluck from our midst a non-politician, a rough-hewn leader able to speak the truth from his or her unsullied heart. Any one of us could do it. From the New Hampshire primary on, we cried out for such a person. Yet aspirant after aspirant just didn't measure up.

Some candidates clearly didn't deserve to carry the torch of political amateurism. Pat Buchanan's man-of-the-people mask didn't stay on long. The guy was a pundit, he drove a Mercedes, he even grew up in Washington. Jerry Brown was reared in politics. He claimed to have seen the dark side of big money and then came back (clothes tattered, a black eye, cuts, and bruises), but his too-belated conversion never really seemed credible. It only played up his weirdness.

Paul Tsongas also stalled. Although for many he seemed to be a viable outsider, the problem was: for whom? His unpolished goofiness and talk of bitter medicine seemed fresh to the Eastern Volvo crowd. But when he took his message to the rest of the country—at

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least judging from his anemic performance in the Midwestern and Southern primaries—he was speaking the alien tongue of the Northern elite.

Ross Perot came the closest. "You got a stray dog that nobody's sure has ever been vaccinated," he said about himself. "Then we got the two registered dogs over here," he added, referring to Bill Clinton and George Bush. "And, believe me, by the time they got through blow-drying their hair and pasting them all up, they looked like they've just been to the kennel show." At one point in the early summer, Perot led Bush and Clinton in the polls. But he could have done better. He could have won.

Perot's failures as a populist are threefold. First, he fatally transformed himself into a more political creature: Perot II steered clear of such inflammatory topics as means testing Social Security. Second, the Texan was severely hurt by his decision to embark on further adventures in paranoia. The third and most important failure was his conspicuous lack of compassion. Good populists aren't Darwinian. Perot's curt dismissal of his son at a damage control press conference, his media killing sprees and other moments of intolerance made some of us wonder what would happen if *we* weren't world-class. If we couldn't keep up on the march to Washington, would he ditch us too?

Gliblock

Most revealing in our search for the populist hero, however, was our reaction to Admiral James B. Stockdale, Perot's running mate. After we slammed the door on applicant after applicant, we beheld a man who embodied everything we'd been asking for. Stockdale was neither a politician nor a salesman and—best of all—he hadn't even wanted the job (Perot had *asked* him). He should have been the poster boy for our democratic myth.

Like Kierkegaard's "man of faith," Stockdale was to be a hidden leader we'd pass on the street. He was the kind of guy who'd blend in with the rest of us at the Cineplex on Friday night. Even his name evoked what we wanted: stores brimming with fruits and vegetables, verdant hillsides, safety, solidity, traffic officers at school crosswalks.

But when James Stockdale took the stage in Atlanta, when America came face to face with the virgin leader we'd been searching for all year to guide us out of our domestic mess, we wanted to run screaming from the room. We make a fetish of ridiculing the varnished hair of Dan Quayle and Al Gore, but what an unnerving apparition was Admiral Stockdale's too-vital shock of uncontrollable white.

The amateur's entry into the lions' den of the professionals turned out to be the ultimate anxiety dream. Stockdale seemed to have fallen through layers of unconsciousness onto a kleig-lit stage. There he was, cornered between two trained lions: a senator who came through with a subject, a verb, and an object every time and a vice president who made up in quickness and Midwestern boosterism what he lacked in grammar. "Who am I," was all the Admiral could ask. "Why am I here?"

After his performance, even the most ardent of cheerleaders for populism would have had trouble envisioning him in the Oval Office. Still, you couldn't blame Stockdale for playing with his glasses, tripping over his words, and saying the weird things from deep in the id that we all say under pressure. We understood all too well why he stabbed the podium with his thick, black pen as if he was trying to find a hidden ejector button that would blast him back to the safety of his office at the Hoover Institution.

Stockdale did what the rest of us—that is, those of us who haven't been practicing to be president for the last 20 years—would have done. Given our quest, you'd think we'd feel sympathy, identification, maybe even joy that one of *us* was closing in on the White House. Instead, many of us felt shame, fear, even contempt. That contempt was for ourselves, for our own self-delusion, for our need to convince ourselves that we could run a government.

This mythology of a popular democracy serves a purpose. It's comforting, not to say sedating, for us to believe that ordinary Americans can get up on stage and debate with the pros. Our worship of amateurism this year is a direct result of our exclusion from the political process and our isolation from each other. The more we cede debate to the pundits, the higher the security walls grow between ourselves and our neighbors, the more we project ourselves back into the political process through the symbolic surrogate of the populist hero. The deeper our emotional wounds, the more we need to believe that one of us could come in from the outside, from beyond the beltway, and lead.

All year, surveys and interviews showed that Americans felt exiled from the political system. We felt powerless to curb Washington's follies: the S&Ls, the deficit, Iran-contra, Iraqgate, the House post office. The pundits, the news media, and the handlers—whose job security is served by our exclusion—had hijacked the electoral process. At the very least, our information was being refracted through their prism of professionalism.

The most important reason for our search for the populist hero who could embody the masses was the

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severity of our isolation. According to the 1990 census, nearly half of all Americans are situated in the suburbs, edge cities, and exurbs, centerless places where congregation is next to impossible. No neighbors or sidewalks, just cars and walls. The other plurality lives in the division and isolation of cities, where the psychic distance between Beverly Hills and South Central Los Angeles is measured in light years.

Weak connection

The second presidential debate dramatically shattered that isolation and powerlessness. The evening revealed something far more important than the candidates' relative suitability. The audience-participation debate—indeed all this year's public access politics—was not about establishing an unmediated connection to the candidates. *It was about establishing an unmediated connection to one another.*

The realization that our concerns about the deficit were sensibly shared by a surprisingly random cross-section of people was democratically empowering. The populist heroes weren't on stage, they were in the audience. They were our neighbors. No longer did we have to delude ourselves that we could make it to the podium. Our dignity came from finally remembering the building blocks of real democracy: that we are the ordinary people who can ask the smart questions.

So as long as we remained out of touch, isolated from our neighbors, we had to deny loudly our reliance on the trained professionals, the lucid technocrats, the political elite. The extent of our dependence on the pros, with their smooth answers and their controlled gestures, was our collective shameful secret. Our rage at the candidates merely underscored our incapacity.

When we reappropriate the knowledge of democracy, we can use and appreciate sound bites—and all professionalism—for what they are: the precious currency of political exchange, the most effective means of conveying ideas to our neighbors. Confident in our intelligence and our sense of community, we can usefully listen to the tutored answers of the Gorebots and the Clin-Trons rather than the blips and fragments that spew forth from the mouths of the informationally unschooled.

The true populist hero for the modern American megalopolis is like a phone line, a conduit through which we can communicate, educate and reassure ourselves. It's no wonder George Bush failed: his chaotic cyberspace offered little but static and broken connections.

Ross Perot offered us two choices, both inadequate. Though he had a high-quality line, it went one-way: from him to us. He was a man of 30-minute infomercials and no questions from the press. His disdain for dialogue exposed a less than populist mentality. He could never be our messenger. And by choosing Stockdale he signaled his contempt for our need for dialogue. He didn't pick Stockdale to stand around and shoot his mouth off, Perot said. "Washington's overrun with people who can do that."

Paradoxically, it was Bill Clinton's smoothness, along with his five-point plans, that gave him the best connection. Not only was the sound clear as a bell, but the president-elect furthered the conversation—and our empowerment—by asking us questions: "How may I connect your call?" he seemed to be saying.

With our newfound self-assurance, we may be able to choose a leader somewhere between the linguistic ineptitude of James Stockdale and the super professionalism of Bill Clinton. Whoever that person is, he or she will have learned from the election of 1992 that the populist for our age must be a facilitator as well as a cowboy. □

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Cardiologist Arrest

We won't lower health care costs until med schools stop turning out so many specialists

by Michael Dolan

If a certain New Yorker had gone to medical school instead of into comedy, he'd undoubtedly be a family doctor.

"I don't get no respect," Rodney Dangerfield, M.D., might mutter. "Other day I'm going to work. Halfway through the crosswalk I see this classmate of mine, guy's a neurosurgeon. He's driving the big car. He's wearing the diamond Rolex. He's got the hundred-dollar haircut. I wave my lunch bag at him. I say, 'Hey, how come you're driving a Bentley and I'm hoofing it?' He gives me one of those little Tom Brokaw grins and says, 'Money talks and GPs walk.' I'm telling yuh, I don't get no respect."

For America's general practice and family physicians, the imaginary Dr. Dangerfield's riff is a cruel truth. Patients love them, but academically and professionally, medical general practitioners (GPs) have little stature and are rapidly becoming an endangered species. In contrast to other industrial nations, where doctordom divides evenly between general and specialized practitioners, 70 percent of the doctors in the United States are specialists. "Right now we have about 100,000 more specialists than we need and 100,000 too few primary care doctors," says George Lundberg, M.D., editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Never has the United States so desperately needed family physicians; not only are they the first line of defense against disease and trauma but they are vital in combating the huge costs of specialized health care. They are as important for what they decide not to do—such as order expensive lab tests, imaging scans or surgery—as for what they do, which is perform simple and less costly in-office procedures and write prescriptions. One hour of a cardiologist's handiwork clearing deadly clots on the surgical table costs many times more than a preemptive visit to a physician who measures— and tells you how to lower—your cholesterol level. A worst-case analysis suggests that our preponderance of specialists could cost the United States $240 billion of the $800 billion spent annually on health care.

Why the tremendous generalist-to-specialist imbalance? Market forces and consumer preference play a role, but you can't understand how the United States got so swamped with specialists unless you foray into the culture of American medical schools. While the schools push aspiring healers away from general practice, they churn out an ever-widening guild of narrow specialists at an alarming and inflationary rate. Ultimately, this has meant more people struggling with rising health care bills and a growing number of families who need a plane ticket to reach the nearest GP.

The family doctor is out

Medical schools have a powerful incentive to emphasize specialties over general practice: Esoteric specialty departments confer prestige which in turn helps schools lure government research grants.

That economic truth goes beyond administrative budget-balancing to directly affect what medical students learn. The internal medicine and surgery departments at med schools consistently bring in the most grants, and as a result, the heads of those departments have considerable power to put together curricula that reflect their own preferences. Generalist studies swing little, if any, weight in this balance of power, because they teach doctors to provide

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workaday care, not to make the flashy technical breakthroughs that lure research dollars.

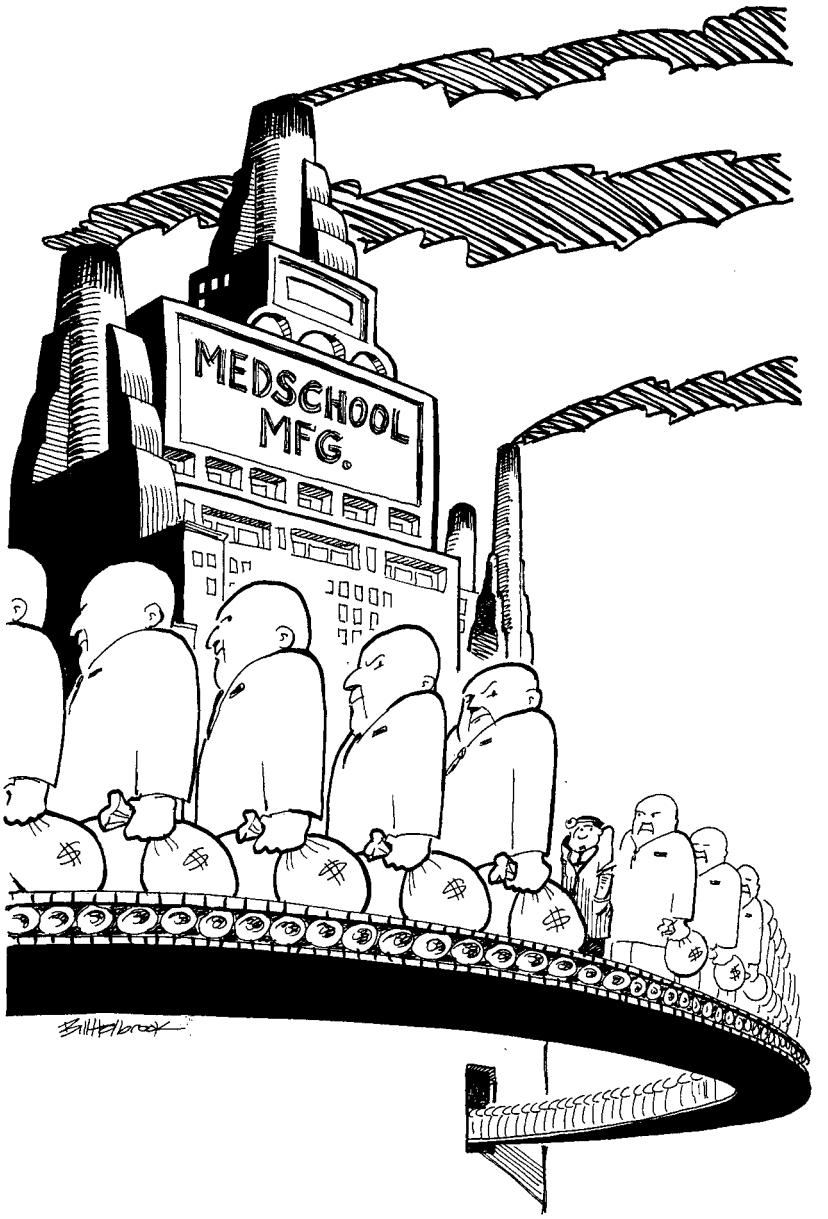
Consequently, top academic medical centers provide few chances for students to observe the practice of primary care, and it's rarely a prominent feature of the curriculum. On-faculty GPs, moreover, tend to be scarce. By the third and fourth years of medical school, students are taught by professors of specialties and never get the chance to learn from or be inspired by a generalist. The natural result is that the faculty tends to view aspiring GPs with about the same respect as a fighter pilot views an infantryman.

"Family practice tends to be at the bottom of the medical school totem pole," notes American Association of Medical Students President Elizabeth Morrison, a family medicine graduate of Brown University. "The perception is that if you are really smart, you should be a specialist in research instead of a community physician."

Even if would-be GPs manage to ignore medical schools' not-so-subtle slant against general practice, they find still more obstacles to overcome. As medicine becomes more and more complex, general practice looks like an utterly daunting option. After four years of study, many would-be doctors can only see how much they don't know. To compensate, they scramble to narrow the spectrum of responsibility facing them.

And why shouldn't they? The lion's share of prestige goes to specialists. They also get more money and the pleasure of digging into esoteric subjects about which they can become certified experts. Without any role models on the horizon, with the prevailing ethic discouraging it, and with less money offered by it, the wonder is that *anyone* chooses primary care.

The rise of specialty medicine fits a historical pattern that is American to its core. Before World War II, most doctors were trained to address the full spectrum of medical need. Specialties like surgery and psychiatry were but fractions of what they are today. Referrals were rare, and many now-familiar disciplines did not exist at all. In 1931, 87 percent of physicians were generalists, and through the war years two thirds of doctors were general practitioners.



After the war, however, Americans developed a crush on specialists. One reason was that insurers

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like to pay for what is done, not what is prevented. As a result, payment charts began to favor diagnostic and therapeutic procedures performed by specialists. Specialty incomes soared, sometimes reaching twice the pay of a GP. Medical educators and students naturally followed the money, which also came to include huge sums paid by the federal government to support specialized medical training and research. Specialty departments soon cropped up in medical schools and before long a few were offering a new "specialty" dubbed family medicine.

In the late seventies, when alarms began to sound about health costs run riot, a chorus of complaint came from behind the walls of academia. The medical school community recognized that among the factors fueling this inflationary engine, the most visible was that horde of specialists and their big-ticket machines. But in the decade since, little has changed except a hardening and widening of the conviction that, absent profound change, Americans face a crisis of our own creation. Whether in medicine's more radical precincts or the staid halls of the American Medical Association, the consensus is that something has to give, and quickly. If it doesn't, notes William Boyles, editor of the insurance industry trade newsletter *Health Market Survey*, "between here and five years from now we will pay tens of billions extra because of the policies of American medical schools."

That money will be wasted despite one of the more promising developments on the health care horizon: the ascendance of managed care, which is politely promoting a shift in consciousness by changing payment systems and using more primary care doctors at the front lines of treatment. Medicare is doing its bit by phasing in a payment scale that attempts to pay more for generalists' diagnostic and perceptive skills and less for scalpel work. And all 73 Blue Cross/Blue Shield plans already have at least one managed care unit, where a case does not get past a generalist physician without justification. Yet while wide application of this idea could reorient the market and send more patients to generalists, few believe it will be enough. In the last decade, the nation's supply of doctors grew 3.5 times as fast as the general population, but current estimates put the number of communities without *any* general physicians at 6,000.

Boyles, a frequent critic of what he calls the "perverse incentives" of the medical marketplace, says he believes more meaningful change will happen only with aggressive outside pressure: "We have to tell medical school applicants, 'There are x number of slots for specialists. Those are all we need. If you want to go to med school, you have to be a primary care physician.' That is not a free-market solution, but this is not a free market."

Dr. Special and Mr. Hide

Another way to speed change is by exercising the very visible hand of government. Since the United States pays the freight for many internships and much of resident education, the feds could keep their checkbooks in their pockets until training institutions agree to limit specialties to no more than half of medical school classes. If the government made it clear that no more heart surgeons would be paid for, no more would be trained. The Canadians tried this heavy-handed approach in 1971 and it worked. Today, their ratio of GPs to specialists is a sane 50:50. At a minimum, the government should reconsider how it doles out the $200 million in primary care grants it now dispenses and end these grants to any university that is not doing its part to promote general practice.

American doctors' self-interest eventually will have to yield, as Canadian doctors' did, to the public interest, argues Robert Woods Johnson Foundation president Steven A. Schroeder, M.D. His foundation promotes primary care as a means of cutting costs and improving quality. If medical schools can't work a change on their output in five years on their own, Schroeder favors changing the medical system to require physician's assistants and nurse practitioners to handle much of the day-to-day primary care, with generalists supervising and carrying their own caseloads. Specialists would have to retrain. At the same time, medical schools would be forced to change the conditions that have produced the specialist surplus. And don't think that pushing more students to general practice condemns them to the poor house. A med school graduate can expect to make $100,000 a year in general practice, hardly a vow of poverty for a 30-year-old, even one with loans to pay off.

Without a change in policy and philosophy, medical schools will continue to turn out hordes of expensive specialists of ever-narrowing skill. America's deranged medical insurance system will continue to pay more for those specialists to do something—anything—than for primary care doctors to exercise Hippocratic common sense. And the mythical Dr. Dangerfield will keep trundling along, coughing the exhaust fumes left by his neurologist classmate and tromping through the debris of an economy foundering on its emphasis of complexity over simplicity, lavish outlay over modest expense, and specialized medicine over primary care. □

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Checkered Past

Why Washington's 13-year taxi scandal won't end

by Christopher Georges

Since 1979, a generation of scandals has come and gone: Wedtech, HUD, Solomon Brothers; government investigators cracked down on Wall Street insider trading and uncovered widespread fraud at the Defense department. They even got John Gotti. Nineteen-seventy-nine also happens to be the year the D.C. government decided to crack open the corruption in the city's taxicab industry. The result? After 13 years of investigation, the D.C. government has managed to convict one official: Richard Little, in 1987. Never heard of him? You're not alone. Little was but a low level cab inspector involved in taking payoffs to approve unsafe cabs. *Thirteen years* —more time than it took the Columbian government to put away cocaine kingpin Pablo Escobar—and about all the D.C. government can point to for its efforts is Richard Little.

Could it be that the cab industry is clean? Not a chance. Cab company owners and taxi drivers openly admit that fraud is widespread. "Anyone who thinks this business isn't corrupt is naive," says one cabby, who, echoing the sentiments of many other drivers, explains that illegitimate cabbies routinely overcharge passengers, bribe their way through safety inspections, swap cabs, and drive without insurance. The fraud and abuse goes well beyond the petty: The media in recent years has not only reported allegations of corruption among city officials, but one TV investigative team even aired video of what could be nothing other than illegal payoffs changing hands to secure certification for unsafe cabs. Other widely reported allegations include the selling of permits to drivers who failed the hack exam or who owe thousands of dollars for outstanding violations. Nearly $4 million in fines remain uncollected, and according to members of the D.C Taxicab Commission, the 13-person body

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appointed by the mayor to oversee the cab industry, there may now be as many as 4,000 illegally operating cabs in the District (compared to approximately 6,500 legal ones). As many as 1,000 of these may have obtained licenses by bribing city workers. One commission member claims to have witnessed—in the parking lot of the cab administration building—the illegal selling of an exam given to all prospective cabbies. So out of control is the industry that one brazen cabby who owed more than $20,000 in fines recently showed up at a taxicab commission meeting to issue a *complaint*. "It's not a question of whether fraud exists," explained one member of the commission, "but how much and where."

Of course, Washington isn't the only city with a cab industry plagued by corruption; but the problems here are widely acknowledged to be among the worst in the nation. "We consider the D.C. system about the best example of how not to run a cab industry," says Alfred Laglasse, executive vice president of the International Taxicab and Livery Association.

And still, the government investigates and investigates. Could these problems be such stumpers that, despite staring at them for 13 years, the D.C. council, police, and taxi commission have been unable to get to their core? Or even to bring someone to trial? Unlike most cases of corruption, where the tough part is discovering that a problem exists, the problem here is known and well documented. But virtually nothing concrete has ever been done to fix it. Why?

The answer, of course, is of importance to anyone who, even occasionally, hails a cab. It's not just that passengers are overcharged, or might find themselves heading toward Glen Echo when they asked for Glenn Dale. Of greater concern is the issue of safety: You don't have to be Mr. Goodwrench to figure out that there are hundreds of cabs cruising the District that couldn't possibly pass a safety inspection; and that's no surprise considering that D.C.'s cabs were found to be, on average, the oldest of any in 10 of the nation's largest cities. Yet many of the city's cab drivers display valid registrations and the cabs they drive are often tagged as being in excellent operating condition. What's their secret? Money, for the most part. Fifty bucks is about what it takes these days to get any scrap heap a safety sticker; and no matter how many driving violations you have, as little as $5,000 will set you up with an illegal permit.

Of course, the police might pick up an illegal cabby now and again, but that's missing the point. The root of the problem lies in the way the D.C. government regulates—or has failed to regulate—the cab industry. While there is no single reason the D.C. council and the cab commission—the two branches charged with overseeing the industry—have allowed fraud and abuse to run wild, peel back the layers of excuses and alibis and you'll find that the regulators and legislators have been virtually captured by the industry they are charged with controlling.

That, of course, is hardly a problem unique to D.C. government; it is played out on a grander scale at the federal level. Some 15 years ago, a congressional investigation on federal regulation concluded that the central characteristic of nine regulatory agencies studied was their devotion to "the special interests of the regulated industry." Today, little has changed. One need only look as far as the S&L scandal or to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's dictates which consistently toe the nuclear power industry's line. Whether it's the D.C. cab commission or the Food and Drug Administration, government regulators can be the most effective safety net protecting the public's interests against the special interests. Unfortunately, as the case of the cab industry illustrates, it often tends to work the other way around.

Taken for a ride

To understand why neither the city council nor the cab commission has come close to keeping the cab industry clean, you have to first consider the unusual amount of evidence of corruption that has been revealed over the years. Here's a sampler:

Fall 1979: The D.C. Department of Public Works produces a report showing evidence of bribery and corruption within the cab industry. Further investigation by government officials is promised.

November 1985: Washington's WUSA-TV, as part of a series documenting widespread fraud among D.C. inspectors, shows one approving an unsafe cab (balding tires, defective brakes, missing lights) without inspecting a single part of the vehicle. The approval came just minutes after the cabby paid $50 to a middleman who promised to use the money to pay off inspectors. Shortly after the reports are aired, then-mayor Marion Barry publicly accuses WUSA reporter Mark Feldstein of "jeopardizing" the city's six-year-old investigation into the cab industry, but says the city's probe would continue.

Summer 1987: The D.C. city council establishes a permanent 13-member D.C. Taxicab Commission to regulate the troubled industry and further investigate allegations of wrongdoing.

Fall 1987: Government officials discover that 3,000 D.C. cab inspection stickers have been stolen from a government storeroom and suspect that they are being sold on the street for approximately $50 each.

October 6, 1987: D.C. police's public integrity department arrests three city officials suspected of

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stealing the stickers. Members of the taxicab commission, however, show little enthusiasm, with one saying, "We are trying to strengthen communications with the cab industry; those arrests could set us back." The next day, charges against the city officials are dropped on a technicality.

December 1990: In an open hearing before the taxicab commission, several cab drivers detail the widespread sale of illegal cab licenses and charge that city officials are involved in the crimes. The commission responds by suggesting the establishment of a "hot line" to allow cabbies to call in anonymous tips.

Fifty bucks is about what it takes these days to get any scrap heap a safety sticker; and no matter how many driving violations a cabbie has, as little as $5,000 will set him up with an illegal permit.

March 1992: 7,500 operating permits—the entire supply for the D.C. cab fleet—are reported stolen from the taxicab commission offices. The fresh supply of stickers on the streets (black market value of $5,000 to $15,000 each) are considered a boon to cabbies unable to renew their licenses because of previous violations or unpaid fines. Another police investigation begins.

The city council announces its own investigation into improprieties at the cab commission.

May 1992: The city council calls off its investigation, because, as one council member explains, "There are serious problems over there and I want to see what happens after the [police] investigation."

October 1992: D.C. police department reports new evidence of city motor vehicles department officials and cab company owners selling stolen 1993 safety inspection stickers. Shortly after, Chief of Taxicabs Ronald Stokes is placed on paid leave from his $65,000-a-year job pending the outcome of four concurrent investigations into corruption at the agency.

Clearly we have a problem. Yet despite all the probing, the creation of the taxicab commission, and the media exposés, the results can be fully recorded on the back of a matchbook. Granted, with Washington posting one of the highest crime rates in the nation, a few million dollars worth of cab-related fraud isn't exactly on the hit list for the overextended police force—which is one reason why the city spends $1.5 million a year on a commission to deal with the problem. But ask officials at the cab commission and the city council why they haven't been able to curtail the abuse, and the excuses come fast and furious.

"Our role is to write budgets and legislation," explains Craig Pascall, general counsel of the city council's Public Works Committee, which is charged with overseeing the cab agency. "We can't issue warrants for arrest." That's true, of course, but the council *can* hold investigative hearings if it desires. And what about the cab commission? Though it has made progress on some issues, such as combatting discrimination by cab drivers, wiping out fraud in the industry is not one of them. Why? While the commission views cracking down on fraud as "its number one priority," according to its general counsel, George Crawford, it has never been able to accumulate enough evidence of wrongdoing to build a case. "People are reluctant to identify the culprits," he says. Commission chairman Daniel Jordan, on the other hand, is still in the denial stage, maintaining that he "hasn't seen any fraud [within the cab agency] proven yet."

So much for the stated excuses. What's the real reason for the failures? Not unlike several regulatory agencies at the federal level, the taxi commission and council are in many ways led by the very interests they are charged with overseeing. Of course, many of the owners of D.C.'s 102 cab companies would benefit from sweeping the fleet of illegal cabbies off the streets. But they also realize that the tighter the commission's grip on fraud, the better it will be able to keep track of legit cabbies and cab companies—a tradeoff some owners thus far have been wary of making.

Cab company interests, for example, helped persuade commissioners to oppose a reform that would have made life rougher for any cabby—legal or illegal—by requiring that a violation be punished with immediate towing. When one commissioner proposed freezing the approval of new permits for a several-month period to allow a survey to determine the extent of fraud and abuse, owners again, leery of closer scrutiny, led a drive to kill the plan. Likewise, since 1987, the commission has been "examining" updating the industry's rules and regulations, a set of guidelines drafted in—and essentially unaltered since

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—1959. In five years, the commission has yet to make a single noteworthy revision, even though many of the rules, such as one stipulating that cabbies need not carry change for anything larger than a five-dollar bill, are neolithic.

And why are the commissioners so eager to side with the owners? "It's simple," explains Arrington Dixon, the commission chairman from 1987 to 1990, "money and politics."

Here's how it works: All but four of the commissioners are political appointees—people selected for the most part based on their connections with the administration or people on the city council. (The other four are industry representatives: cabbies or owners.) The advantage of such a system is that it brings to the commission a "citizen's perspective." But it also means that the commissioners, if they are not a courageous group, can easily fall prey to the pressures of cabby interests who are wedded to the status quo. Savvy cab industry leaders, well aware that the commissioners are beholden to the politicians, make their presence known both through political contributions and lobbying. And family connections, no matter how ethically questionable, don't hurt either. The owner of one of D.C.'s largest cab companies has hired the son of Councilman Harry Thomas to lobby the council on behalf of the cab firm. (Councilman Thomas, by the way, happens to be the chairman of the council's Public Works Committee, which is responsible for oversight of all cab issues.)

The commission pays heed not only to preserve its contacts on the council, but its coffers; after all, the council controls the commission's $1.5 million budget. "It's just not smart to say anything against the council," admits taxicab commission member Lillian Cooper-Wiggins, "even off the record."

Cooper-Wiggins, however, does concede that the council "is lobbied very hard" by cab company interests. Consider the clout of Willie Wright, a director of one of the city's largest cab associations, Capitol Cab. Wright, who served as an industry representative on the commission until last year, is not only regarded as an able political fundraiser, but he knows how to treat a politician. Capitol Cabs' drivers, for example, are especially busy on election days, providing free rides to the polls for voters in selected areas; it's not uncommon for a special Capitol Cab to wait at the airport to ferry local leaders about, gratis, upon arrival in D.C.; and Wright's political endorsements carry weight, as he is viewed as the informal leader of a large block of cabbies. So influential is Wright that he openly boasts (and few in the industry deny) that he has handpicked some of the members of the commission. So when Willie doesn't get his way, you can be sure he lets his friends in public office know.

And what's Wright's way? Maintaining the status quo, for the most part. While he is praised by even his business competitors for running a clean shop, he is as widely criticized for blocking reforms, such as holding up for several years the computerization of the agency's data even though it would have cut into corruption. Why the stubbornness? "The computers would also monitor the performance of the companies," said Dixon, who proposed computerization five years ago. "If a complaint came in, a letter went out. That, they didn't like."

No fare

Certainly, the cab commission and council's failure can be felt every time you ride in a cab with shoddy brakes. But it also teaches a larger lesson about regulatory breakdown that applies equally to the federal government. While there was no single cause of the collapse of the savings and loan industry, one key factor was Congress's 1982 decision, under pressure from powerful (and never-stingy) banking lobbyists, to allow the S&Ls to make risky, high-yield investments. Similarly, D.C. politicians are loathe to offend the cab interests. And, just as so few banking regulators had the courage in the seventies and eighties to stand up to Congress, the cab commission has largely shied away from taking on D.C. pols.

Whether it's the U.S. Congress or the D.C. council, legislators must not only be aggressive about overseeing the regulators, but willing to push them in the right direction. This means resisting the temptation to cater to lobbyists and contributors whose interests may not be in sync with the public's. When such temptation is not resisted, the results can be disastrous, as when Congress, long at the beck and call of tobacco interests, refused for years to push federal health regulators to warn the public about the dangers of smoking. And at the same time regulators must have the courage to stand up to legislators and the administration even though their positions may be in jeopardy if they do.

As the federal government gears up for a re-regulatory burst under the new Democratic administration, it could do worse than consider the lesson of a tiny local agency across town. The bad news is that we've learned again that even the best-intended agencies can be swayed by the very interests they are created to oversee. The good news, however, is that it won't take much to draw the new federal bureaucrats' attention to D.C.'s cabby morass; the first time they ask for a ride to Capitol Hill and find themselves headed towards the Capital Centre should do the trick. □

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Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong

The most important lesson our schools don't teach

by Kathleen Kennedy Townsend

"What would you like to be when you graduate?" asked a grade school teacher of her students in a Baltimore County classroom I visited recently. A young man raised his hand: "A pimp. You can make good money." The teacher then turned to a female student and asked, "Would you work for him?" "I guess so," the young woman replied lethargically.

In my five years in the Maryland Department of Education, I've heard hundreds of similar stories—rueful teachers' lounge chronicles of abject moral collapse by children barely old enough to make grilled cheese sandwiches by themselves. But these days you don't need to work in education to hear such mind-numbing tales. Turn on the TV news and there you have it: Our schools are hotbeds of violence, vandalism, and unethical behavior. Recently we've heard of a student-run LSD ring in one Virginia school and the bartering of stolen college entrance exams in one of New York City's most selective high schools. Sixty-one percent of high school students say they cheated on an exam during the past year. Nationwide, assaults on teachers are up 700 percent since 1978. Each month 282,000 students are attacked. And for the first time ever, the risk of violence to teenagers is greater in school than on the streets.

Obviously, we've got a problem here—a problem not just of violence, but of values. Plain and simple, many of our kids don't seem to have any, or at least any of a socially constructive kind. But what to do about 12-year-old aspiring pimps and cheaters? You might think the solution lies with that "family values" constituency, the Republicans. Yet a year of podium-thumping in favor of "values" by the Bush administration was not backed by a

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single concrete plan of action. In his four years as president, George Bush offered nothing more substantial than a PR stunt—his Thousand Points of Light Foundation. Still, at least the Republicans have been willing to *talk* about values. For all of Bill Clinton's 12-point plans, he has yet to come up with a specific agenda for restoring values.

To explain away that omission, Democrats argue that the ultimate responsibility for inspiring values lies not with the government, but with the family. A day in one of the nation's public schools might well convince the average citizen that those Democrats need a reality check. Face it: In some homes, parents simply aren't paragons of civic or ethical virtue. If we rely on the family alone to instill values, we will fail. As one 21-year-old ex-con said, "Kids grow up with a father or an uncle who is robbing stores. They figure, 'If my father can do it, so can I.'" In other homes, parents simply aren't around. In a series of recent workshops sponsored by the Maryland state government, high school students suggested a number of solutions they thought would help them better withstand the antisocial pressures that buffet them. While much of what they said was expected—more information about drugs, greater student participation in school and county decisions—one was a real eye-opener: They asked that their parents have dinner with them more often.

Ultimately, the goal should be to help parents raise kind and law-abiding children. But how do we get there? Why not turn to the one institution that sees the problem more closely than any, and that touches children on a regular and sustained basis: the public school. Why not teach values in school?

Before you dismiss this suggestion as a William Bennettesque ploy to end calls for more school resources, additional jobs programs, or parental-leave legislation—all worthy goals—hear me out. Teaching values does *not* mean using the classroom to push a particular point of view on any political issue—say, abortion or the death penalty—that has worked its way to the core of the values debate. We're not even talking about school prayer or requiring the Pledge of Allegiance. It's much simpler than that: Teaching values means quietly helping kids to learn honesty, responsibility, respect for others, the importance of serving one's community and nation—ideals which have sufficiently universal appeal to serve as the founding and guiding principles of this country. In the schools, values education means lessons about friendship and anger, stealing and responsibility, simply being polite, respecting others, serving the needs of those who may be less fortunate—all lessons sadly absent from today's curriculum.

Teaching these sorts of values does more than yield heart-warming anecdotes of students helping old ladies across the street. It brings results—tangible improvement to the lives of children and their families. A survey of 176 schools that have adopted a values curriculum found that 77 percent reported a decrease in discipline problems, 68 percent boasted an increase in attendance, and 64 percent showed a decrease in vandalism. Three years after the Jackie Robinson Middle School in New Haven, Connecticut, initiated a values curriculum, the number of student pregnancies went from 16 to zero. After the Merwin Elementary School in Irwindale, California, instituted a character education program, damage due to vandalism was reduced from $25,000 to $500; disciplinary action decreased by 80 percent; and—could it be?—academic test scores went up.

Teaching values is clearly worth the trouble. So why is "values education" still one of education's neglected stepchildren? Why is it that schools that now teach values are rare—most often independent efforts by one or two inspired educators? Because, despite the family values chitchat, there's been no political or popular consensus that values should be as much a part of the curriculum as reading and writing. We need a more organized approach. If we are ready to instill a sense of values in America's youth, it will take a concerted effort by both political leaders and educators to make it happen.

Selective service

So where to begin? How about with a notion relegated to the back burner in the get-it-while-you-can eighties: community service. Serving others is held in such low regard among our youth that 60 percent of high school students said in a recent survey they simply would not be willing to "volunteer to serve their community for a year." That's a remarkable figure not only because so many aren't willing to serve, but because so many of those who responded negatively have never served to begin with. The students' distaste for service could largely be a distaste for the unknown. But when students are exposed to this unknown—through activities such as tutoring, visiting the elderly, rehabilitating homeless shelters, lobbying for new laws—their reaction is appreciably different.

Alethea Kalandros, as a ninth-grade student in Baltimore County, missed more than 70 days of school and was tempted to drop out. The next year she missed two days of school. What happened? She enrolled in a program that allows her to volunteer at the Maryland School for the Blind. "It gives me a reason to come to school," she says. Alethea is part of Maryland's pioneering effort in promoting com-

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munity service. While the program is now voluntarily offered by only a couple of schools, Maryland, after years of heated debate, recently became the first state to require all high school students to perform community service in order to graduate. Starting next year, all students entering the ninth grade must complete 75 hours of service or classes which incorporate service into the lesson, such as stream testing in an environmental course or writing about visits to the elderly in an English class. As part of the program, students are required to "prepare and reflect." This means, for instance, complementing working in a soup kitchen with learning about the most common causes of homelessness.

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Any of a wide variety of activities fulfill the requirement, from repairing a local playground to tutoring fellow students. The impact, however, goes beyond helping the needy. Community service, as the limited experience in schools has shown, teaches students values and citizenship. For instance, while fourth, fifth, and sixth graders at Jackson Elementary School in Salt Lake City, Utah, were studying ground water pollution, they discovered that barrels of toxic waste were buried just four blocks from their school. They waged a vigorous public relations and fundraising campaign to clean up the site, eventually winning the support of the city's mayor. When this effort was stymied—Utah state law does not allow for private donations to clean up such sites—they lobbied the legislature and changed the statute. And while service programs can help students make a difference outside the school, they also have an impact inside the classroom: They make learning more interesting by simply helping students to understand how to apply textbook lessons in the real world.

Despite successes in experimental programs, stubborn resistance to community service from educators is still the norm, even in Maryland where the Superintendents Association, the PTA, and the local boards of education all fought against the new service requirement. One of the most common knee-jerk reactions is cost. But ask educators in Atlanta, Georgia, who have been operating a regional service program for eight years, and they'll tell you it doesn't cost a dime. Of course, that doesn't mean all service programs can be run as efficiently, but it does show that costs can be kept low.

Beyond that, the arguments against service become more strained. The president of the Maryland Teachers Association, for example, called the proposal "enforced servitude" and claimed that it violated the Thirteenth Amendment. What's really bothering the educators? Probably the fact that they would be required to change their teaching methods. As Pat McCarthy, vice-president of the Thomas Jefferson Center, a non-profit foundation specializing in values education, says, "The biggest impediment to values education is teacher education." You can't teach community service out of a textbook; it takes time and thought, which, of course, takes effort. And that, for some educators, is a tough concept to accept.

While community service teaches values through hands-on experience, that's but one piece of the puzzle. If we want to instill values, why not take an even more straightforward approach: Teach them directly. It may sound radical, especially when we are talking about methods like memorizing passages from the Bible, "bribing" kids with discounts at the school store to behave decently, permitting students in class discussions to describe problems they face at home, and allowing teachers to make it clear that they might not approve of some parents' values. But while students are sometimes taught that what happens at home is not always a good thing, teaching values does not mean separating the parents from the lessons. Quite the contrary, a smart values program includes parents, too. Before a values program at Gauger's Junior High in Newmark, Delaware, was implemented, 100 people—parents, teachers, students and community representatives—attended a two-day conference in which they learned about the purpose and goals of the program and the ways they could help implement it. Parents provided input and teachers knew they had community support. And in the end, nobody had to worry that little Petey would bounce home from values class clutching the collected works of Lyndon LaRouche.

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Is it really possible to teach values that we all agree upon? Of course. In fact, schools in an indirect way already present students with a set of values that is universally respected: What are our efforts to integrate our schools and prohibitions against stealing or drinking in school if not an education in values? It's not difficult to take this type of thinking one step further, creating a curriculum that teaches other values that are universally accepted but are almost never actually taught directly to our youth. In districts such as Sweet Home, New York, and in Howard and Baltimore counties, Maryland, superintendents formed representative groups of community leaders that included people as ideologically diverse as fundamentalist ministers and ACLU attorneys. They held public forums and listened to community opinion and after months of extensive discussion, the groups produced a list of values with which everyone was comfortable. Now, when people in these communities ask, "Whose values?" they can proudly say "Ours."

At places like Hebbville Elementary in a low-income section of Baltimore County, the results are impressive. There, teachers hold out the promise of tutoring the mentally retarded as a reward for children who have finished their assignments, done well on a test, shown improvement, or been helpful in class. The students actually vie for the privilege. Tiesha was picked to help out in a class of 15 seven- and eight-year-olds whose IQs are in the 30–45 range. "I like being a helper," she says. "I tried to teach my cousin that 100 percent and 100 percent equal 200 percent. When I saw her write two, I was so happy."

At the Waverly Elementary school in Baltimore City, values lessons are taught through discussions about peer pressure. The teacher chooses 15 students, divides them into four groups, and asks them to perform skits about peer pressure. One skit involves Daniel, whose three hip classmates mock him because he wears non-brand-name tennis shoes. Daniel persuades his parents to buy Nikes and when he returns to school, the gang accepts him. In reflecting upon the skit, Daniel says, "All the friends were making the decision rather than me making my own decision." Another student said, "Daniel could have decided to be different." It is significant that the students made up this fact pattern. In the kids-and-sneakers stories you usually hear, children are assaulting each other for Air Jordans. Here, they are girding themselves to accept an alternative.

That's well and good, but we're still missing one crucial element: accountability. For values education to succeed and prosper, schools need to show that it's paying off in tangible ways. That means, for instance, keeping track of indicators such as rates of crime and vandalism in schools or the number of students involved in community service where values are being taught.

Class war

Many may resent this call for values as a way for parents to shirk their own responsibility onto someone else, or may see it as another passing fad. As for parents, they may cling to concerns about which values their children should learn. But our collective trepidations pale next to the alternative: another generation of children growing up without a moral compass.

Changing will take courage, but we can take heart from one fifth-grade class I watched where the topic was "the right to be an individual." The purpose was to help the children decide when their own actions are inappropriate and to develop strategies for improving their classmates' behavior. The discussion began with a very simple story about a boy named Bobby who never washed himself and had no friends. Eventually he realized that he'd have to take a bath if he wanted his classmates to ask him to play. The immediate lesson was about cleanliness—about as innocuous a value as you can find. But the moral had pertinence even for frequent bathers: Sometimes change is not only good, but necessary. That's a lesson that should resonate, not just with fifth-graders, but with the next administration. Clearly, the old ways of inculcating values in our kids are no longer working. We grownups have got to change our thinking, too. □

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Of MITI and Men

Japan's industrial policy sets the standard, but can the United States do better?

by Edward N. Luttwak

For several years now, industrial policy has been hotly debated among experts in and out of Washington while attracting little attention from the mass media. Its proponents argue that government could and should assist the progress of American industry, now facing foreign competitors greatly helped by their own governments. Opponents insist that any government interference with the free workings of market forces can only be wasteful and counterproductive. Now that we are done with the presidential election, the time has come to raise this subterranean debate to the surface.

The case for industrial policy can be summarized in one word: Japan. Or, more fully, the success of the Japanese bureaucracy lies in its nurturing of highly successful new industries by funding research and development of innovative products and production techniques; by inducing banks to lend them long-term investment capital at low interest, allowing them to acquire efficient large-scale plants early on; making tax concessions in favored sectors, as long as they use the extra money for investment rather than high executive salaries or dividends; and by restricting or prohibiting imports to assure high profit margins on domestic sales, thereby enabling companies to subsidize their own exports (this is Japan's product-improved alternative to "dumping," i.e., selling abroad below cost, which is not a violation of international trading norms).

Further measures on behalf of particular industries have included government purchasing regardless of price or performance (critical to the growth of Japan's mainframe computer industry), manipulation of import restrictions to force foreign (mostly U.S.) companies to hand over technology to Japanese companies in exchange for access to the Japanese market

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(much used to nurture the petrochemical industry), and the behind-the-scenes organization of "voluntary" mergers to consolidate industries that bureaucrats considered too fragmented to compete effectively in world markets. But consolidation never reaches the point of monopoly. In fact, it is one of the basic principles of Japan's industrial policy that precisely because they are collectively protected, the different enterprises within each industry must remain fiercely competitive with each other, lest they become sluggish and self-indulgent.

From the introduction of government-sponsored iron mills, foundries, textile mills, and shipyards at the start of Japan's modernization in the 1870s, to the creation of the computer industry out of nothing in the 1960s, to the present encouragement of software, nanotechnology, and advanced materials, Japan's entire development has owed much to its highly original industrial policy. The Japanese did not invent government support of industry (it was already old hat in 18th-century France), but Japan has led the way in systematically promoting new industries while phasing out decaying ones. American proponents of industrial policy see no reason why the United States should not adopt Japan's winning formula, which is now widely imitated in both Asia and Europe.

The case against industrial policy can also be summarized in one word: bureaucracy. This view holds that government officials cannot outperform the free market in shaping the development of industry and would probably damage it instead with waste, fraud, and mismanagement. It is certainly true that the largely corrupt and inefficient bureaucracies of most countries are not to be trusted with anything so delicate as industrial policy. Even in ordinary state functions, from the issue of obligatory documents to the operation of schools, hospitals, prisons, or the armed forces, plain incompetence is almost a norm, and so is corruption. It follows that virtually any form of industrial policy is bound to be turned into a further way of looting the public treasury or exploiting hapless consumers or both.

Thus state funding for industrial investment would mostly go to sham enterprises providing false or inflated plant and equipment invoices, rather than pay for any actual plant or actual equipment. This was the case with Italy's *Cassa del Mezzogiorno*, whose grants have littered the southern countryside with empty factory buildings, built by companies whose peak earnings came just before they opened for business, and just after they collected on the phony invoices they had sent in. Likewise, Japanese-style tariffs and import restrictions meant to raise the profits, capital, and investments in export industries would merely spawn facade industries made up of one-screwdriver local assemblers and re-labeling outfits, as well as inefficient producers of non-exportable high-cost/low-quality goods. This happened in most Latin American countries until the recent wave of trade liberalization, and most notoriously in Peru, before President Fujimori's abolition of most import restrictions. In extreme conditions, as for example in West and Central Africa, even the seemingly most foolproof measures have a way of becoming counter-productive. Thus industrial-policy prohibitions on the export of raw logs, meant to induce the growth of local sawmills, have merely reduced hard-currency earnings from timber exports. Few sawmills have been built to cut wood for export simply because political insecurity inhibits investment. At the same time, raw-log exports have greatly declined, and because the remnant is now smuggled out, the proceeds are illegal and cannot be remitted to local banks accounts, flowing instead into equally illegal foreign accounts.

The U.S. bureaucracy, however, is not supposed to be corrupt. Thus American opponents of industrial policy prefer to emphasize the bureaucracy's vulnerability to pork-barreling, log-rolling, and vote-seeking politics-as-usual in distinctive U.S. style. As they see it, investment funds provided or channeled by the government would not go to promising but needy start-up sectors, but to the industries that are already best represented in Congress by way of PAC monies and other forms of lobbying, which are best able to deliver votes at election time. By definition, these would be well-established industries, the ones that least need government help, and which are much more likely to have glorious pasts than promising futures. Equally, import restrictions would not lead to the capital enrichment of industries poised to become champion exporters, but rather would be applied to help the weakest industries least fit to compete in world markets. The same is true of all other industrial-policy measures, such as stimulative government purchasing: They too would be captured to fatten the fattest political cows, while doing little to help new industries that lack the money and the connections to extract favors from Congress.

Change of fools

But free-market true believers are not content with such merely pragmatic arguments. They insist that industrial policy would fail even in the hands of government officials both perfectly honest and miraculously apolitical. Their argument begins by noting that, especially in our times of accelerated change, technologies and product markets develop in unpredictable ways. That is why IBM was caught utterly unprepared by the PC revolution, GM missed out on minivans and

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sport utility vehicles, and America's electronic industry mistakenly thought that VCRs and fax machines would be $20,000 items, of interest only to a handful of highly specialized users. No group of government officials is likely to do any better in picking future winners and losers. As the opponents see it, if in the fifties we had established an activist bureaucracy to encourage and help finance the growth of the most promising new industries, the United States would have wasted much money on plants built to produce nylon shirts, mimeograph machines, eight-track tape players, and analog calculators.

Nor does such an outcome necessarily imply an incompetent industrial policy. Competence in any ordinary sense has nothing to do with it, because even the best analysis of present information cannot anticipate the configuration of future products, or the future evolution of production technologies. They can be uncovered only by trial and error in the broadly varied strivings of many different enterprises. Most are destined to fail while a handful succeed triumphantly, as Xerox, Apple, and Microsoft each did in turn, and as a great many other start-ups have done on smaller scales within their own more narrowly specialized sectors—within the biotechnology industry, for example.

Compelling though it is, the theoretical argument against industrial policy immediately evokes a practical counter-argument: Japan's evident success. If its bureaucrats have been able to do the theoretically impossible, so can ours. Nor does the highly successful growth of Japan's industry derive from any visible process of natural selection. The great flood of Japanese products that have claimed primacy on world markets has come almost entirely from a few very familiar names (Hitachi, Toshiba, Canon, Matsushita, Sony, etc.) and not from a lucky few among a myriad of start ups.

In response, the American opponents of industrial policy challenge the evidence. They argue that even the champion economic Samurais of Japan's mythic Tsusho Sangyo-Sho, or Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), have in fact failed—except in claiming much of the credit for the achievements of Japan's private enterprise. They hold that Japan's phenomenal industrial success was actually due to hard work, a sound system of mass education, the abundance of capital supplied by a very high savings rate, and the strength that Japanese corporations derive from the exceptional loyalty of their employees—all the results of deep-seated cultural propensities, not bureaucratic wisdom. To that end, the free marketeers are forever reciting the list of MITI's greatest errors: its failure to forecast—or support—the growth of Japan's automobile industry (Honda was advised to stick to motorcycles); its over-investment in steel during the sixties and in aluminum during the seventies; and the failure of its "Fifth Generation" computing program. As for the absence of start-up success stories from the Japanese scene, the explanation given is that natural selection and the finding of developmental paths through trial and error take place all the same—but within the large Japanese companies. In effect, they function as conglomerates of many different enterprises, many of which fail and wither, while others succeed and grow.

MITI issues

These are persuasive arguments, but it is revealing that they are least persuasive to those who know the most about Japan and its economy. Thus Chalmers Johnson, the noted Japanologist who wrote the standard work on MITI, is not coincidentally a fervent advocate of industrial policy for the United States. While recognizing that MITI has failed at times, Johnson insists that it is eminently worthwhile to have a government department staffed with elite officials to promote the country's industrial development. Only an American MITI could coordinate the uses of all government resources, regulatory powers, research activities, and foreign trade policies for the greater benefit of American industry. Today, different agencies pursue different goals, each on its own divergent track. An American MITI could, for one thing, stop the drain of U.S. inventions and technology, especially when their development was actually funded by the government.

At present, for example, the United States spends some $5 billion of the taxpayers' money each year on medical research; that is more than three times the amount Japan spent. But in the American case, the commercial exploitation of the results is neither guided nor assisted, nor controlled by the government. Instead, when individual scientists working in university or government laboratories have completed 99 percent of the research on a promising new product at government expense, they join with venture capitalists to set up their own bio-technology companies on the side, which fund the final 1 percent of the research. Much more often than not, when one of these outfits comes up with a valuable product, it does not in fact grow to manufacture and market it, providing rewarding employment for many in the process. Scientists are mostly disinclined to go into business, while venture capitalists generally want to collect their winnings, not pour more capital into building up a production company. Hence the know-how is sold to an established pharmaceutical company, often enough one of the large Japanese or European mass-

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production "fermenters." Thus the lucky scientists and venture capitalists become personally rich; the taxpayers who have paid 99 percent of the research get nothing; and the manufacturing, marketing, and management jobs generated by the new product end up overseas.

An activist American MITI could certainly be of use in this setting, first to assert control over valuable inventions that belong to the government, and then to ensure that they are sold to American pharmaceutical companies equipped to produce and market the goods, so as to generate jobs and tax revenues within the United States. At present, by contrast, there are only government scientific research agencies that know little and care less about the economic consequences of their programs, and a Department of Commerce that does little more than keep statistics on the continuing outflow of U.S. biotechnology.

But the strongest argument for industrial policy is perhaps that we already have one, albeit very fragmentary and inefficient. U.S. military research and development does generate "spin-off" inventions and production techniques of civilian value. But of course, that is not the primary goal and the commercial results are inevitably meager as compared with the cost. Likewise, all sorts of government agencies and departments act every day in ways that have an impact on U.S. industry, through the regulations they issue, the equipment and services they purchase, etc. It would require only their conscious coordination to extract valuable benefits—if, that is, an American MITI is granted the authority to impose such coordination. We have, moreover, some examples of deliberate, rather than incidental, industrial policy, such as the U.S. government-sponsored Sematech semiconductor research consortium. (On the other hand, the lack of a thriving semiconductor industry in Hong Kong, which has no industrial policies of any kind under its laissez-faire regime, provides a noteworthy contrast.)

Nor is Sematech the only example. While the Bush administration was loudly proclaiming its devotion to free enterprise and its horror of industrial policy, the U.S. Department of Energy quietly organized the "U.S. Advanced Battery Consortium" to come up with a better power source for electrical cars than heavy and inefficient lead-acid batteries. That Japanese-style venture, jointly funded by the government and by GM, Ford, and Chrysler, is of course a sin against the doctrine of free enterprise. It also offers a promising mechanism for the development of a critical component, which could yet determine the fate of the U.S. automobile industry. If we are to be sinners anyway, let us sin more effectively, by assisting important industries systematically. □

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TIDBITS & OUTRAGES

NOW WE KNOW WHO WOULD HAVE HANDLED THE JERRY BROWN BUS TOUR

According to *The San Francisco Chronicle*, a bus company in Pinole, California recently paid $1,300 to have its new administrative building analyzed by a practitioner of *feng shui*, the ancient Buddhist practice of arranging surroundings to promote prosperity and harmony.

THIS JUST IN: DYSLEXIA DISCOVERED TO BE CONTAGIOUS

The Wall Street Journal reports that Marilyn Quayle recently wrote in a Bush-Quayle fundraising letter of her party's dedication to "principals over politics."

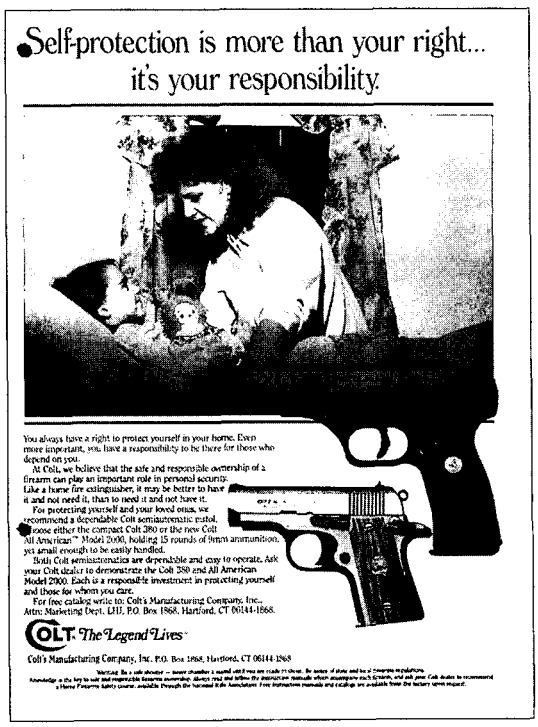
FUNNY, THAT NEVER HAPPENS WITH CONGRESSIONAL PAY RAISES

The New York Times revealed that a cleaning crew threw away a box of approved legislation it came across in the House of Representatives clerk's office. At a Capitol Hill garbage collection point, House staff members used rakes in an attempt to find the Freedom Support Act and a foreign aid bill for Russia. But the bills were already on their way to a landfill in Richmond, so staffers hastily reconstructed the bills from committee files instead.

. . . AND TALK ABOUT YOUR CAPTIVE AUDIENCE

A new magazine, *Prison Life*, targets inmates in state and federal prisons. Publisher Joe Strahl told *Advertising Age* that "prisoners are very brand loyal and represent a significant amount of discretionary spending."

"OH MOMMY, TELL ME AGAIN ABOUT THE TIME CINDERELLA EMPTIED A MAC-10 INTO HER STEPSISTERS."



—Scott Shuger

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No Dollars, Comm

Eighteen cost-free steps to a better America

by Charles Peters

Before the polls had closed in Juneau, before the gospel choir had cleared its collective throat in Little Rock, before most of the nation knew we even had a new president, skepticism began gently to swirl through the Washington establishment. It's swell that Bill Clinton has a five-point plan for everything, sniped the pundits, but the numbers just don't add up. There's simply no way to get this country moving again —at least not in the right direction for the long term— without ballooning the deficit so much that Keynes himself would get the willies.

No way? Well, if asked—okay, even if not—we at the *The Washington Monthly* are perfectly willing to share our revolutionary program to fix America, a program that, believe it or not, won't cost a cent. Some of our ideas will even raise revenues. Many of these ideas will be familiar to veteran readers—who wouldn't be veteran readers if they hadn't decided to forgive our willingness to repeat ourselves for a good cause. And even they should scan what follows because there's enough here that is new to keep them awake.

As for the inevitable charge that our plan is just a pipe dream on paper, consider this: Since the last version of what was then called "America: A Repair Guide" appeared, two causes long advocated by the *Monthly* were adopted by Bill Clinton during the 1992 campaign. One is to make higher education possible for all qualified students, without regard to their ability to pay, by having the government guarantee long-term loans to them that would be collectible through the IRS. The only way we differ from the president-elect on this issue is on his proposal to forgive the loan in return for national service. We believe there is an obligation to national service that should not be dependent on a potential reward and that one of the president's highest obligations is to challenge Americans to volunteer without regard to gain. We also doubt that the government could afford to both forgive the loan and finance service. When I worked for the Peace Corps it took $9,000 a year to maintain a single volunteer in the field—and that was in inexpensive third-world countries 30 years ago.

The other *Monthly* cause adopted by Clinton is a capital-gains tax break for new investment. We also urge

Charles Peters is editor in chief of The Washington Monthly.

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of being reversed by an appeals court.

The Bush administration, with the charge led by none other than Dan Quayle, talked at least some sense about loser pays earlier this year. Now it's up to Bill Clinton to wake up. Unfortunately, he hasn't shown the slightest sign of understanding the problem, and based on his experience in Arkansas politics, he probably has an unhealthy fear of trial lawyers.

2. Switch to no-fault in malpractice cases and auto wrecks.

Provided that the medical review boards grow teeth so that patients can feel confident that drunks and incompetents won't be slicing them open [see "The Case for Smart Regulation," below], a no-fault system would help ease a legitimate pressure on doctors to jack up their fees: ever-rising malpractice insurance premiums. The trade-off for consumers would be that they would no longer be compensated for "pain and suffering"; on the other hand, they would be compensated for their lost earnings and the costs of their care immediately, rather than after a long and ugly legal battle, and, in general, they would pay less for medical services. Similarly, no-fault auto insurance would eliminate not just pain and suffering compensation but also the fraud that accompanies many of these suits, and it would reduce the cost of auto insurance for everyone. If we instituted no-fault, who would be the biggest losers? The lawyers—which is yet another reason the rest of us would gain. [On medical malpractice, see "Tilting at Windmills," May 1991. On auto insurance, see "Whose No-Fault Is It, Anyway?" Peter Spiro and Daniel Mirvish, October 1989.]

How to save democracy

One in four Americans goes without basic medical care; on the other hand, if you can afford it, you can get everything from fresh kidneys to a new face. The poorer three out of five American families pay more in taxes than they did in 1980; on the other hand, the richer two pay less. Add it all up, and what have you got? A two-tier education system, a two-tier health care system, a two-tier tax code. Inequality in America isn't solely the result of these three things. But why use all three of them to make the problem worse, not better?

3. Evaluate performance, not credentials.

"Value of Money is Questioned in National Debate Over Improving Schools," ran the headline of a

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recent *New York Times* story. For years, reformers have held the incorrect assumption that more money is the only answer to saving our public schools. That assumption is starting to crumble as people realize that money meant to educate kids is being wasted on salary increases for teachers who can't teach and for administrators who are either unnecessary or incompetent or both. One way to deal with this problem is to get rid of the inept ones and give raises solely on the basis of merit. Another is to change the way teachers are certified.

Suppose you earn a master's degree in English from Emory University and, having tutored and served as a graduate teaching assistant, decide you want to start teaching in Georgia's public schools. Not so fast. So you know *The Great Gatsby* inside and out. So you can hold a class rapt for hours at a time. So what? Before you can even be considered for a teaching job, Georgia insists you take courses like "Behavior Modification" and "Reading Techniques."

Given the parlous state of public education, it's criminal to erect obstacles to new teachers that at worst turn away the talented and ambitious and at best work to smother their creativity. A smarter system would certify teachers based on their knowledge of their subject and their ability to get up before a class of kids and teach. States like New Jersey, bucking union opposition, started experimenting with this type of system a few years back, and the results thus far have been encouraging. Unfortunately, too few other states have followed their lead. One that has is Arkansas. Bill Clinton wrote us a letter in 1988 pointing with pride to Arkansas' alternative certification program. And he had the courage to support other education reforms, so unless he caves in to his new friends at the NEA, the chances seem relatively good that he will provide the national leadership that has been missing from the school reform movement.

4. Control the doctors.

Let's say your house is on fire. You call the fire department. Imagine a conversation that goes something like this:

You: Help! My house is on fire!

Receptionist: Hold, please.

[Muzak]

Receptionist: Can I help you?

You: Yes, dammit, my house is on fire! Send help!

Receptionist: Fine. Would Tuesday at 3 o'clock fit your schedule? The charge will be approximately $10,000 per room, depending on how many are inflamed.

Never happen, right? Of course not—we wouldn't let it. But ask yourself: Why is it that the health care market has produced such terrible distortions—that the growing number of doctors leads to fees that outstrip inflation year after year? That where there is the greatest need for good health care—in Appalachia, for example—there is so little supply? Because, out of all the life-protecting professionals, only doctors are permitted to hold their power over consumers' heads. It's time to switch that relationship around. After all, we don't let all soldiers and sailors serve in San Francisco—or all policemen patrol just Park Avenue.

Another approach to controlling medical costs would be to eliminate what we suspect is the main motivating force behind physicians' greed—the unnecessary ordeals that accompany their training. "You know, I didn't get into this for the money," says one exhausted intern after 36 hours spent at a D.C. hospital. "But after the crap they put me through, I feel like I deserve it." Making all experienced doctors work at hospitals just two or three nights each year would put an end to the brutalizing ritual that's required when only interns and residents carry the whole nighttime load. It's insane for our medical system to take idealistic young people—you know them, the ones who play with plastic stethoscopes when they're six—and fill them with self-pity by grinding them down with unnecessary labor, which is then paid for by their patients for the rest of those doctors' lives. [See "A Platform for the Eighties," Charles Peters, February 1979.] If you think these ideas too extreme, we offer a compromise: socialized medicine.

5. Adopt a health care system that works for everyone.

We have the most advanced medical facilities in the world; our doctors are the best-trained anywhere; our medical procedures are state-of-the-art. But what good is all this when there are 37 million Americans without health insurance and when millions more who are served by Medicaid are subject to second-rate treatment—or none at all.

No question, our system's broke. For a fix our best hope is to combine the best features of the Canadian system—one where the government provides health care for all citizens—with some American ingenuity. Under a Canadian-style plan, not only would all Americans be assured of receiving care, but they could choose their own doctors. The fatal flaw of Britain's socialized medical system is avoided. And the Canadian system is cheaper. It does a better job than we do of holding down drug costs (prescription drugs cost 32 percent less than

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they do here) and reducing the number of unnecessary but expensive tests. They also are better at controlling the tendency of surgeons to slice where surgery is not needed. The result is a system that costs much less than ours—9 percent of GDP versus 14 percent. And it does so without impoverishing physicians. Canadian doctors earn an average of $100,000 a year. The catch is that you have to wait in line for some procedures unless your life is threatened. If we want to avoid the wait and have all the benefits of the best in the Canadian system, all we have to do is apply the savings we will make on administrative costs to remedying the deficiencies of the Canadian system. Is that possible? Administrative costs here gobble 24 cents of every dollar spent on health care. In Canada, the figure is *one* cent. So the savings will be about $80 billion, which should more than cover the cost of abolishing long waits in line. [See "Socialized Medicine Now—Without the Wait," Nancy Watzman, October 1991.]

6. Switch to a sane Social Security system.

Because of increases in the Social Security tax, poor workers saw their tax burdens rise by as much as 28 percent over the course of the eighties. Meanwhile, at the other end of the system, we continue to fund the retirements of Rockefellers well in excess of the amounts they contributed while they were working. But the unfairness of this system isn't a function of benefits just for the rich. Because Social Security benefits are largely insulated from taxation, income taxes paid by an upper-middle-class elderly family amount to less than half those paid by a working family with the same income. To make this system fairer, we should provide generous tax breaks to the working poor and the lower middle class and offset the loss to the Treasury by taxing, at regular rates, all Social Security income of the affluent instead of the half of that income that is subject to taxation now. We really prefer a means test that would strip benefits from the Rockefellers, but such a reform seems unlikely, while full taxation is clearly within the realm of the possible, since Bill Clinton seems sympathetic to the idea. [See "The W-2 Step," James Bennet, June 1991.]

7. Create jobs by reforming the retirement and health care benefit systems.

An even better reform would be to remove the costs of health care and social security from the employer-employee relationship. Economists blame a wide array of economic and social factors for the slow rate of job creation, but perhaps no reason is as significant as—and less recognized than—the burden the American system places on workers and those who employ them in paying for Social Security and health care benefits. The combined employer-employee social security tax rate rose from 4 percent in 1955 to 15.3 percent in 1990, and today the average fringe benefit package comprises nearly 30 percent of the average salary package. The ill effect is that it presses employers to avoid hiring so that they can avoid paying for more benefits. For the employer, it makes more sense simply to horsewhip the workers he's got. So for Susie, who's looking for a part-time job as a receptionist, the doors are shut, and for Sam, who's got the job now, it means indecent hours—not to mention the loss of a huge chunk of his weekly pay going to subsidize an overworked retirement benefits system.

The solution lies in removing responsibility for health insurance and retirement security from the workplace altogether. For starters, the government should provide nationalized health care, funded by the income tax. One advantage, of course, is that this would provide more Americans with health care, but it also means that paying for the care would no longer be a burden on the employer-employee relationship. For the business owner, the cost of hiring part-time Susie would thus be reduced as he wouldn't be burdened with paying the additional benefits. And at the same time, it means that Sam, with Susie filling in, can work a more decent schedule. The same holds true for retirement benefits. With the cost taken off the back of the employer-employee relationship, employers would be encouraged to hire more workers instead of loading overtime on those they have. They would also be encouraged to give part-time employment to young parents who want to devote part of their days to caring for their children.

8. Tax the churches.

No one knows how much wealth our churches have accumulated, though conservative estimates place it at $700 billion. As of 1987, for example, the Catholic Church was New York City's largest landowner. Numbers on church wealth are elusive because religious organizations are the only nonprofits in the country that do not have to report financial information to the Internal Revenue Service. Considering the earthly indulgences the religious tax exemption has supported in the past few years—everything from payoffs for prostitutes to

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air-conditioned doghouses—closing that loophole would be a good first step. Churches should then have to pay taxes on all property used primarily for religious, as opposed to charitable, purposes. Sound crazy? Think about it: The Constitution's establishment clause forbids government to single out one religion (or religion generally) for help or harm. Singling churches out for an exemption violates that rule; taxing them just like other property does not. [See "Pennies from Heaven," Elizabeth Lesly, April 1991.]

9. Raise the estate tax.

Right now, the federal government collects only about 5 percent of the $200 billion Americans bequeath each year. It does not make much sense to tax someone far less on what he has been given than on what he earns by the sweat of his brow. The reason the tax is so small is that the exemption on inheritance is so large: Today, individuals can bequeath $600,000 tax-free, and couples $1.2 million. That's why only 3 percent of estates are now subject to taxation. Cutting the exemption in half, to $300,000, would extend that tax to the wealthiest 10 percent.

We just don't allow enormous estates to go untaxed, however. The way the entitlements system works, the average receptionist can wind up subsidizing the estate of a wealthy retired lawyer. Rather than spend his family wealth to pay for his health care, that elderly lawyer can rely on Medicare, funded by the receptionist's taxes, to foot his bills. It is simply grotesque for the state to provide an incentive for families not to take care of their own. Here's how to put an end to this anti-family con: When the lawyer dies, in addition to other taxes due, the government should take from his estate the amount of the benefits he received in excess of what he contributed, plus interest.

10. Close the angel-of-death loophole.

This loophole protects inherited capital gains from taxation. When Muffy Chastleton Wentworth inherits stock in Company X that her father Tripp has held for 30 years and then turns around to sell it, she pays taxes on the capital gain only since the day she inherited. These two steps—eliminating the loophole and lowering the estate tax exemption—would raise $80 billion by the year 2000 and make the economy more efficient to boot. [On both the estate tax and the angel-of-death loophole, see "The Secret Solution to the Deficit," Paul Glastris, January/February 1991.]

The case for smart regulation

Conservatives are afraid that regulation will cripple legitimate business. Liberals should share that fear instead of automatically advocating more government rules as the answer to every problem. But conservatives do need reminding that we all want clean air and water, safe cars and planes, prices that are determined by fair competition instead of monopoly power, and food and drugs that do not endanger our health. All that means that we must have government regulation and that, to protect us, it will have to be tough and incorruptible—and to protect the legitimate interests of business, it will have to be smart as well. Here are some regulatory proposals that we do not feel have received enough attention and that meet our no-cost test.

11. Mandate that all fleet vehicles run on natural gas or electricity.

"We are doing everything we can to guarantee . . . that there will be an adequate supply of hydrocarbons," announced George Bush in the early days of preparations for the Gulf war. His guarantee, it turned out, carried a pretty high premium. And despite the war, Americans simply stayed in the same rut, swallowing 18 million barrels of oil each day, burning some 12 million of those in vehicles. You might not hear much about alternative fuels from the Bush administration, but they do exist. Electricity, for example, costs about half as much as gasoline and contributes less to smog. Likewise, natural gas, which is in plentiful supply in the United States, is cheaper and contributes 80 percent less than oil to smog.

The most efficient way to switch to alternative fuels is to begin with vehicles that travel local routes and are refueled at a central location—fleet vehicles like dump trucks, delivery vans, taxicabs, rental cars, and city and school buses. The deadline for conversion should be flexible, giving more time to those fleets that take more than five years to turn over (in D.C., for example, the buses take 10). Switching these vehicles to natural gas or electricity would not only drastically reduce smog in our big cities (the reason Los Angeles has already started converting its municipal fleets) but it would cut American oil consumption by 10 percent—about as much as we import from the Persian Gulf. [See "Kicking the Oil Habit," Peter Gray, March 1991.]

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12. Make roads and highways safer and stronger.

When you can't tell the difference between the speed bumps and the rest of the highway, you know you have a problem, and that just about captures the sorry state of America's roads and highways. Despite an annual outlay of nearly $80 billion, the federal government now classifies more than one half of America's roads as deteriorated—that is anything from "poor" to "unfit for high speed travel." And that means a lot more than a bumpy ride—namely $120 billion annually in federal and local repair costs, and countless lives and injuries. More than anything else, an ill-conceived roads policy virtually drives roads to ruin. The way the bidding rules are written, the best bidder never wins, just the cheapest. At the same time, federal laws specifically forbid the states from forcing contractors to guarantee their work. The result is that delays and road repair expenditures often double the total expense of the road.

Three simple steps, all of which are now in place in many European countries, can reverse the trend. First, states should require builders to guarantee their roads. Second, and in return for the guarantees, local governments should make their design requirements flexible, freeing the contractor to use the best materials and the best design. Finally, low bid requirements should be ditched and replaced with long-term design cost-benefit analysis. Would it pay off? According to one recent federally supported study, simply encouraging widespread use of chemical binders in asphalt —what the Europeans have been doing for years—could save $270 million.

One practical suggestion about highway spending and other economic recovery motivated infrastructure rebuilding: It is crucial that we dedicate the money to projects that are not still on the drawing board but that are ready for the digging to begin and the concrete to start pouring. The average bureaucrat will think he has spent money when he has signed a contract obligating the funds. But often the truth is that the money won't be spent for two or three years. [See "Why American Roads All Go to Pot," Betsy Dance, November, 1991.]

13. Put an end to the self-regulation of professions.

Talk about contradictions in terms. Too often, professions wind up being regulated in their own interest, rather than in the consumers'. In Virginia, an alcoholic surgeon operated drunk for years, even though his peers and a representative of the local medical board knew about his problem. Perhaps the scariest part is that the behavior of his colleagues, and even of the review board representative, was perfectly understandable. It was the natural result of a regulatory system in which judges have more incentive to be sympathetic to the accused than to the victim—incentives like friendship and shared self-interest. This is a recurring problem with police review boards, a problem that could be eliminated by replacing those police judges and investigators with civilians. Besides medicine, the law is another profession in which self-regulation has become a painful joke. For these two fields, there is a nicely symmetrical solution: Put lawyers on doctors' boards and doctors on lawyers'. Given the long history of mutual vigorous criticism between these two groups of professionals, they certainly know each other's shortcomings inside and out. Why not make a virtue of this tension? [See "Tilting at Windmills," May 1991.]

At least in the business world, CEOs make a pretense of fair play by hiring outside auditors to scrutinize the books. But appearance is about as close to fairness as it gets. The way the American accounting system works, companies pick their own auditors—a system as ludicrous as having an author pick his own reviewer. The collapse of the S&Ls is the strongest evidence for the need to reform this incestuous system. To take one celebrated instance: The Big Eight accounting firm of Arthur Young gave Charles Keating's Lincoln Savings & Loan an "unqualified" audit—the accounting industry's big thumbs-up—at the same time federal regulators, a group not known for delivering early or strong warnings, concluded that Lincoln was a "ticking time bomb."

Auditors have an awfully big incentive to play nice with the auditees: The corporations are their bosses, and if they deliver a skeptical report about, say, an exaggerated earnings statement, they might lose the account. On the other hand, the Arthur Young executive who oversaw the Lincoln account got paid off by being hired away by Lincoln's parent company for just under $1 million per year.

Here's a cheap way to split up this cozy relationship: Rather than let corporations pick their own auditors, have an independent authority like the Securities and Exchange Commission do it. In addition, auditing firms should be permitted to stay with their corporations for no more than three years, so that they don't get too comfortable with each other, and so the auditors know that someone else will be coming along to check their work. The concept can be extended to other areas of regulation, such as testing of pharmaceuticals. Drug companies are responsible for testing their own products and then reporting the results to the Food and Drug Administration—a sys-

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tem that makes it irresistibly easy for drug firms to hide test results that show their products may have dangerous side effects or other drawbacks. Instead of self-monitoring, an independent laboratory, financed by all the companies, should conduct the testing. This would not only save money by eliminating duplication of facilities but would also be more objective. [See "Accountants: Those Wonderful People Who Brought You Maurice Stans," Thomas Redburn, February 1975, and "Tilting at Windmills," June, 1992.]

How to save politics

14. Make anyone testifying before Congress swear in.

One of the most serious problems in government for the last 25 years or so has been misleading testimony by executive branch witnesses before Congress. A tendency to gild the lily has been characteristic of such testimony from the earliest days of the Republic, but with Vietnam and Watergate, lying seemed to become standard behavior. The result has been explosive growth in the size of congressional staff as members of the Senate and House seek their own sources of information so that they can expose executive branch deception. There is a simple way to curb the lying: Testimony before Congress should be under oath, as 90 percent of it is not today. This may not deter the most determined liar, but it will remind the average witness that an obligation to tell the truth to democratically elected representatives outweighs loyalties to coworkers and agencies. [See "No Truth, No Consequences," Katie Hickox, November 1992.]

15. Reform campaign spending.

These days, on average, 60 percent of a Senate candidate's campaign budget goes for broadcast advertising; overall, the cost of TV advertising in congressional campaigns climbed 169 percent between 1976 and 1990. It's become a cliché to point out that those ads are doing precious little to meaningfully differentiate candidates or to draw more Americans into the political process. This isn't just the product of a few unscrupulous political consultants; it's the inevitable result of a system that combines high ambition with high technology and low accountability. So let's change the system. Mandate that, in exchange for free air time before an election, all political ads feature the candidate—and only the candidate—addressing the viewers at home. Sure, these ads might be dull: no uplifting music or girls in Laura Ashley dresses, no wind-blown flags or glowering rapists. But just imagine George Bush trying to woo voters by declaring, "Mike Dukakis let a scruffy black guy out of prison so he could rape a nice white lady . . . ," and you get some idea of how much good this change would promote. And you don't have to bore the viewer. Remember that night in October when Ross Perot won the ratings race with his discussion of the deficit?

Cutting down the costs of advertising will help wean politicians from the influence of the PACs and their other big funders. A further reform—forbidding politicians running for state office to raise money out of state—would force them to quit cold turkey. During the last round of congressional campaigns, more than half the senators running for reelection received most of their funds from outside their states. Could Al Gore really have been considered the senator of the average Tennessean when a whopping 96.5 percent of his ticket to Washington was covered by New Yorkers, Californians, and other nonresidents? [See "The Keating 535," Andrew Bates, April 1991.] We are also very sympathetic to Jerry Brown's $100 campaign contribution limit. [See "Tilting at Windmills," March 1992.] It's delicious to imagine candidates announcing their 800 numbers on the free air time that TV and radio stations would have to provide in order to retain the licenses that we the people grant them.

16. Open up government.

The controversy that swirled around Los Angeles police chief Daryl Gates last year centered, of course, on a lenient attitude towards police brutality. But it also illustrated an equally insidious, but more subtle, problem: the bureaucrat who can't be removed from office no matter how incompetent. Gates, in the wake of the Rodney King beating, couldn't be ousted despite the pleas of virtually an entire city and its political machinery. It points to an age-old problem of bureaucracy: how to prevent the unwanted official from hanging on, while at the same time maintaining the good parts of the civil service system.

The reformers who broke the political machines earlier this century had legitimate points: When patronage drove politics, government workers were often lazy and corrupt. Today, they tend to be lazy and unhelpful. Now that we've discovered that civil service rules can be as deadly to good government as smoke-filled rooms, it's time to put our lessons together. Turn 50 percent of civil servants into political appointees—not hacks, but talented people who can pass merit tests. Of course, in getting rid of half the

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bureaucrats, we should be careful to hold on to the good ones—which means we must eliminate "bumping," the reduction-in-force practice by which a tenured employee, when his slot is cut, can simply shove out a younger, even though better, worker and swipe his job. Once these cuts are made, we'd still have enough career, nonpolitical workers to carry the institutional memory from one administration to the next. We'd also have political appointees who are not merely competent but also committed to the ideas of each new administration and directly accountable to the voters for their performance.

Other important benefits of this reform are less immediately apparent. Ambitious, capable young Americans, instead of rolling their eyes at the notion of serving in the bureaucracy, would see a future in signing up with an exciting candidate and sweeping into office with him. To guard against the political appointees hanging around too long, limit them to four two-and-a-half-year terms. Cycling more citizens through government jobs would boost public understanding of what makes government work and what makes it break down: Journalists would return to their newspapers knowing where bodies are buried in the bureaucracy; businessmen who had performed a public stint would stop whining vaguely about "big government" and start targeting their criticisms at specific programs that waste taxpayer dollars. And all that patronage would cut the high cost of running for office: Because candidates would be able to reward loyal volunteers with jobs, they would rely less on paid professionals to staff their campaigns—which would further drive down the cost of running for office.

If this reform is too radical for the new administration, we argue that Clinton, at the very least, ought to undertake a major effort to revitalize recruiting of civil servants. Getting a government job these days, unless you know someone on the inside and get in through the buddy system, is a long dreary process, heavy with unanswered phone calls and interminable waiting. In fact, only 60 percent of government agencies have recruiting budgets—a key reason why 90 percent of college honor students don't even consider working in government. [See "Patron Saints," Lois Forer, July/August 1991.]

17. Offer a term-limits compromise.

The problem with most of the proposals to limit the terms of congressmen is that they involve sacrificing experience to encourage new blood. Our proposal is to retain the advantage of experience by keeping the Senate as is—with no term limits—while restricting House members to three four-year terms, or a total of 12 years. By offering members of the House the lure of not having to run for reelection so often, we just might persuade a reasonable number of them to support the 12-year limitation. If you know any congressmen, you know that what they hate most is having to face reelection campaigns every other year. (We suggest limits for the House rather than the Senate—even though they might make as much sense for the upper chamber—simply because we have no comparable carrot to to lure Senators into agreeing to such a reform.)

This proposal is similar to the reform we propose in civil service. In both cases, our aim is to provide the continuity and wisdom that come from experience as well as the vitality and variety that new talent can bring.

18. Encourage good civil servants to stick around longer.

The so-called "unfunded pension liability"—the amount by which planned pension benefits exceed workers' contributions—in the federal civil service alone stands at $593.8 billion. Add in pensions owed to servicemen and -women, and the total goes to over one trillion dollars. Mind you, that's just at the federal level. States, cities, and towns are grappling with an aggregate unfunded liability of between $160 billion and $450 billion. A major cause of this massive liability is that, in the federal system, a civil servant can retire with full benefits at age 55, after 30 years of service. That's why some 362,892 of federal civil service pensioners—nearly 25 percent—are still in their fifties. Servicemen can retire after 20 years, while they are still in their early forties. Likewise, in Washington, D.C. (as in many other cities), firefighters and policemen can retire after 20 years, which is why most of the city's almost $5 billion unfunded pension liability is earmarked for those two groups. The best solution is to extend the length of service. Hold on to those veteran servicemen, firemen, and policemen for at least 25 or 30 years—until they are no longer physically able to do the job. And keep those veteran civil servants, the ones who can show the appointees the ropes, until they are 65. Pension liability, it should be remembered, will also be radically reduced if our Step 16 is adopted. The patronage employees would serve short periods, never more than 10 years, and would then not be eligible for government pensions. [See "A Pension for Trouble," Matthew Cooper, July/August 1989.]

These are a few of the reforms the *Monthly* advocates. Got a better idea? Write and let us know. □

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Technical Foul

Not even Magic can change the facts about AIDS

by Michael Fumento

What You Can Do to Avoid AIDS.
Earvin "Magic" Johnson.
Times, $3.99

"George: Portrait of a Serial Killer—One AIDS Death Every Six Minutes." So read a recent cover of the "gay/lesbian/bisexual newspaper" *The San Francisco Bay Times*, that featured the official presidential portrait of George Bush. Actually, one AIDS death every six minutes would come out to about 88,000 deaths. Despite early government projections of 45,000 to 57,000 AIDS deaths this year, the actual number will probably be about 30,000.

Exaggerating the numbers has long been an accepted practice in the AIDS establishment, as is accusing George Bush of mass murder. By underfunding the fight against AIDS, the charge goes, President Bush has assumed responsibility for the greatest cause of premature homosexual deaths since the Nazis rounded up gay men and shipped them off to the camps. Words like "holocaust" and "genocide" pepper the language of the AIDS activists, even though in the very next breath they may loudly assert that AIDS is not a homosexual disease at all, that indeed it "does not discriminate" and "is an equal opportunity destroyer." There's nothing new about this rhetoric; what's new is hearing it from a national sports hero.

Enter Earvin "Magic" Johnson, the star Los Angeles Lakers basketball player, who in less than one year retired twice from basketball and once from the National Commission on AIDS (NCA), to which President Bush had appointed him. Johnson quit the NCA in October, saying that the president had "dropped the ball" in the fight against AIDS and that Bush "cut [the commission] down, left and right, in funding," meaning not the commission's fund-

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ing but that of the war against AIDS. So doing, Johnson won many accolades from the media and the AIDS establishment. Few noted that Johnson had been threatening to quit the commission since shortly after his appointment and that of six meetings it held while he was on it, he attended only two. (Bush mistakenly said during the first presidential debate that it had been one.)

It's understandable that Johnson didn't feel like sitting on the commission but the reason he gave, which echoes the cover of *The San Francisco Bay Times*, has no grounding in reality. It's true that for both fiscal years 1992 and 1993 Congress appropriated more money for one AIDS category than the administration requested, that of services to AIDS patients. (It spent $56 million more in 1992 and $42 million more for 1993.) Services to AIDS patients are all well and good, but they do not save lives. That's the job of prevention and research, and here Bush would have actually *outspent* Congress if Congress had let him. For fiscal year 1992, the administration requested $39 million more than Congress appropriated. For fiscal year 1993, Bush requested $26 million more than Congress appropriated. That jibes neither with Johnson's assertion nor that of activists who blame the epidemic on Bush nor that of Elizabeth Glaser who, at the Democratic national convention, blamed Bush personally for the death of her child. Bush may have committed many a wrong during his four years as president, but underfunding AIDS research simply was not one of them.

Further, AIDS research funding is already 10 times that of cancer on a per death basis, 20 times on a per patient basis. Ironically, the same day the *Los Angeles Times* carried a front-page story about a Johnson AIDS fundraiser, it carried several stories describing promising advances in cancer therapy that are held up for lack of funds. It reported that in real terms, cancer spending in 1991 was well below the level it had been in 1980.

Activist tense

These charges against Bush reflect the sense among activists that if twice as much is spent on the AIDS budget, then the disease will be cured twice as fast, if three times as much is spent, then it will be cured three times as fast, and so on. But it doesn't work that way. There are only so many trained medical researchers capable of soaking up so much funding, and cancer research and other medical fields have already given over many of their best and brightest to AIDS work. Already, there are hints that there may be massive wasted spending in the guise of AIDS research. But the same media that saw fit to run hundreds of stories on Pentagon cost overruns a few years ago has steadfastly resisted the temptation to write articles about wasted AIDS money.

Far more ink has gone to books on AIDS prevention. Earlier this year Magic Johnson put out his own, *What You Can Do to Avoid AIDS*, a thin paperback that has a list of endorsements—including a slew of AIDS activists and the American Medical Association—longer than Johnson's right leg. The book generated controversy when some major family discount store chains refused to carry it, citing its sometimes graphic language. This being a family magazine, none of the dirty words will be repeated, but as far as AIDS books go, Magic's is rather tame. Johnson even uses "massage" as a euphemism for masturbation, perhaps because he doesn't want to read in the newspapers that he's encouraging kids to masturbate.

Some have commented on the hypocrisy of a man who's hinted at having had thousands of lovers writing a book urging sexual caution and restraint, but this is unfair. "St. Earvin," as one of his few critics has dubbed him, may not be a modern St. Augustine, but he certainly has learned the hard way that sexual indiscretion can be deadly. This book can be seen as an effort to keep others from ending up where he did.

The facts in the book are by and large correct. Yet the message is anything but straightforward. Consider the last paragraph in the book, which its promoters have been wont to repeat: "Take responsibility. It's your life. Remember: The safest sex is no sex, but if you choose to have sex, have safer sex each and every time. HIV happened to me, so I know it could happen to you. I want you to stay safe. Your life is worth it."

Note the passive tense: "happened to me." Sorry, but HIV doesn't just "happen." Influenza happens, measles happen, and colds happen, but HIV results from a very limited number of intentional behaviors. How does a book that so graphically details how to prevent HIV transmission (for example, seven pages devoted exclusively to proper use of a condom; a detailed discussion of why household plastic wrap is superior for protection during cunnilingus than is the plastic film used in trash bags) reconcile that with saying it "happens" to you?

Johnson also engages in the same false sloganeering that, like exaggerating the number of AIDS deaths or portraying George Bush as a mass murderer, is understood by the AIDS establishment to be justified: "We're all at risk," he says. "Anyone can get HIV," and "Your sexual orientation has nothing to do with your risk of getting HIV." Tell that to gays in San Francisco where 11,033 gay and bisexual adults have died of AIDS since the epidemic began, while

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the city has reported only 89 heterosexual transmission cases. Such slogans should irritate gay men the same way that a woman might be peeved were she told that her gender had nothing to do with getting breast cancer. Rhetoric that is sexual-orientation neutral may be politically correct, but in the realm of AIDS it isn't scientifically correct.

Johnson & johnson

Johnson also tells us that, "In New York City, over half of the people with AIDS are heterosexuals," without informing us that three-fourths of the women in this category are intravenous drug abusers. And in light of the continued controversy over whether he was telling the truth when he said that he was infected by a woman, it's not surprising that Johnson doesn't tell us that of over 35,000 total cases, New York City lists only 18 men as having gotten the disease from a woman. This is because the city's department of health is one of the few in the nation that actually investigates claims of sex transmissions, rather than merely taking the man's word for it.

One aspect of Johnson's book which *is* accurate and that cannot be emphasized enough is the low to non-existent risk of being infected through casual contact. Maybe he should have aimed his book at NBA players instead of teens because it was in part the unease expressed by members of other teams over playing against someone with HIV that led Johnson to retire again.

No one could doubt Magic's good intentions in putting out this book, but one has to wonder if it was really necessary. The teenage audience, which it clearly targets, is already under a constant bombardment of AIDS books, lectures, articles, and television shows with AIDS messages aimed especially at heterosexual teens. It would be a wonder if most teenagers are not now convinced that teen AIDS is more prevalent than acne. Yet for all the propaganda and blaring headlines ("AIDS Runs Wild Among Teenagers" read a headline in a Honolulu newspaper), teen AIDS is almost non-existent. Last year, 160 teenage AIDS cases were diagnosed in this country, 10 fewer than the year before. In terms of teenage infections as well, there is no evidence of a big or growing problem.

A report released by the House Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families, chaired by Rep. Pat Schroeder of Colorado, which called the federal response to teen AIDS a "national disgrace" and which prompted the Honolulu newspaper headline, claimed that not only was there an explosion of new teenage cases but of infections as well. The committee cited two studies in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Yet one of these studies, that of military applicants, showed the opposite—that infections among teenage applicants are few and declining—and the other, of Job Corps applicants, merely showed that teenage HIV infections are disproportionately a problem of disadvantaged minorities.

Other infection studies have given similar results, such as one of over 16,000 college students reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1990 that indicated an overall infection rate one-half that estimated for all age groups by the federal Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC). Of the 30 students who tested positive, only two were female, even though more females were tested than males. ("College age" AIDS cases—20 to 24 years old—also declined last year, from 1,626 in 1990 to 1,485 in 1991.) A CDC study released in June of people randomly tested in 38 hospitals shows infections in the 15–24 age range to be one fourth that of those in the 25–34 and 35–44 age ranges. Looking at these and other infection data, the June CDC study concluded, "For both men and women, infection is most prevalent in persons in their late twenties and early thirties."

Peter Plumley, writing in the actuarial magazine *Contingencies*, estimates that about 300 teenagers are infected through heterosexual intercourse each year. Saving those lives, plus those of homosexual teens, is a worthwhile goal, but so should be saving far greater numbers of lives. It may come as a shock to hear that 12,000 youths ages 15–24 die in traffic accidents each year with many times that number severely injured; that half of those lives could be saved if those youths had worn safety belts, and that a recent study shows that only about a fourth of all high schoolers always wear their safety belts. If a fraction of the time, money, and effort thrown into terrifying America's youth over AIDS were used in a campaign to increase seat belt usage, the number of lives saved would utterly swamp the entire number of teens getting AIDS or contracting HIV.

But can't we teach both safe sex/no sex and safe driving to our youth? Yes, but we don't. In a sort of Gresham's law of priorities, the low but highly publicized risk has eclipsed the high risks. Consider that while AIDS education has become mandatory in California public middle and high schools, driver's training has been dropped from the state school budget for lack of funds. California has misplaced its priorities—though perhaps no less than the rest of the nation—and its youth will die because of it. Don't expect a celebrity book about this, though. Sam Kinison might have written one had he survived his car accident. He died, however, because he wasn't wearing a seat belt. □

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Home Economics

In the homeless debate, liberals and conservatives have more in common than they think

by Jason DeParle

The Visible Poor: Homelessness in the United States
Joel Blau *Oxford, $22.95*

Rude Awakenings: What the Homeless Crisis Tells Us
Richard W. White Jr.. *ICS, $24.95*

One of the remarkable things about this year's presidential race was the absence of the poor. God knows there are plenty of them—almost 36 million by the government's last count, 4 million more than when George Bush took office. Nearly one of every four children in America now falls below the poverty line, which is pretty far to fall. So where, during the election, did they all go? The candidates spoke about America as if it is one big, struggling middle class, where everyone (but the rich) combats equal odds—all Cincinnati and no South Central.

Among the seemingly banned words was "homeless." You remember them—the men who smell bad, act crazy, sleep on park benches, demand your spare change; the women and children cycling through dismal welfare hotels. Does anyone know what the candidates proposed to do about them? Homelessness in America is now so thoroughly accepted that it doesn't even prompt cheap campaign promises.

Where candidates have been silent, authors have been prolific, and there is now a sizeable, though mostly obscure, technical literature about the homeless that addresses everything from theories about how to count them to estimates of their caloric intake. Earlier this year, two books were added to the list.

On the surface, they seem like they couldn't possibly disagree more. Writing from the left, Joel Blau describes contemporary homelessness as the latest in a series of economic upheavals, inherent in capitalism, that have periodically tossed Americans from jobs and homes since the Industrial Revolution. "Modern homelessness is, to a great extent, a product of the transformation of the U.S. economy," he writes. Blau, a professor of social work at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, acknowledges that substantial numbers of homeless people suffer from mental illness, alcoholism, or drug addiction. But he warns that such problems can be the consequences, and not just the causes, of homelessness. And he clearly does not like to dwell on unflattering behavior. To do so, he warns, would imply that the homeless "are not like you and me."

It is just this kind of argument that enrages Richard W. White Jr., a former antipoverty planner in LBJ's Office of Economic Opportunity who seems to have traveled the road to neoconservatism. What upsets him most isn't homelessness, but the advocates who try to "make the homeless seem 'just like you and me.'" White argues that mental illness and addiction are not only central but underreported, and that the homeless are an even motlier lot than most people presume. He is especially incensed at Mitch Snyder, the late street guerrilla of the homeless movement, and Bob Hayes, formerly its chief legal advocate. He calls them cynical liars who heap unfair criticism upon the American system and rend the political culture with their tactics. He goes so far as to argue that, "We may have more lying than we have injustice."

The notion that these books have anything in common might horrify both authors. But that is the most surprising and important thing about them: For all their apparent mutual animosity, they tell a similar— or, at least a reconcilable—story. Clearly White (and most conservatives) thinks that the homeless are more responsible for their condition than does Blau (and most liberals). But both authors

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also think that the transformation to a post-industrial economy is part of the story, because it has driven down the wages of unskilled laborers. Both argue that the erosion of public benefits has played a role. (The average welfare mother with two children gets 42 percent less cash assistance now than she did two decades ago.) Both recognize that the family has fragmented, leaving more people living alone, with no one to rescue them during crises. Both authors are struck by the fact that modern homelessness emerged not during an economic downturn but during a period of general prosperity. There's even some modest agreement on the endlessly divisive question of numbers. Blau estimates 735,000 Americans are homeless on a given night, and calls it evidence that something in America is "profoundly wrong." White argues for "a maximum" of 600,000 in a given week, but cautions that this is "not, per se, a true crisis."

The agreements continue: Each book discusses the de-institutionalization of mental patients, and both view it as a disaster. No one can read either book and fail to understand that drugs and alcohol play leading roles in many journeys to the streets. And most interesting of all, both books stress the devastation of the low-income housing market.

Of all the causes of homelessness, this may remain the one that's least understood by the public. Put simply, two decades ago there were more cheap apartments than poor people, but now needy households outnumber cheap apartments by about two to one. White spends many chapters arguing that housing alone is not the problem, but then arrives at a conclusion that seems to take him by surprise: "I must acknowledge that lack of appropriate housing nevertheless is an important contributory factor."

Blau and White could probably spend the rest of their lives together on a deserted island without ever agreeing whether the homeless "are just like you and me." But they do seem to agree that the homeless are a particularly vulnerable lot being pushed onto the streets both by personal problems and the larger economic forces imperiling tens of millions of other poor people.

Spare change

Part of the reason the authors can disagree so stridently while telling compatible stories is that homelessness rarely has a single cause. So where one person can abstract economic forces as the villain, another can see personal pathology. Martha Burt, a researcher at the Urban Institute, illustrated the way multiple causes of homelessness allow for conflicting interpretations in her book *Over the Edge*, also published earlier this year. It is unfortunate that the examples she offers are fictional ones, but until there is better actual reporting they will have to do:

> Joe is a white man in his forties, who does occasional day labor in the skid rows of several southern cities, among which he moves. He had many years of stable employment in a Midwestern factory job. During that time he married, had three children, supported his family, and drank a lot. He had no trouble maintaining his job until the factory closed. Other factories in his city also closed, leaving many out of work. His drinking increased, and after a futile search for work locally, he left town to look for work. He returned home every few months for the first year, but has not been home now for three years. He earns whatever money he spends, sleeps in cheap hotels when he can afford it and in shelters when he can't, eats at soup kitchens, and continues drinking.
>
> Latoya is a woman in her late twenties, with three children. Her oldest child was left with relatives so he could attend school. Her two preschoolers live with her. She has never been married, and lived with her mother until she became pregnant with her third child. Thereafter she stayed with relatives or boyfriends, but has never had primary responsibility for paying her own rent, because she never had enough money to do so. She is a high school dropout and has never worked. She left her last boyfriend (the father of the third child) because he persistently abused her physically. She does not have enough money to pay rent for her own apartment although she receives welfare. She is psychologically depressed.

My own instincts here are a bit more doubting: Joe may have collected a few pink slips even during better times, and Latoya's problems might include drugs. But take them at face value. Liberals can argue that this is a story of economic collapse—Joe has been thrown from work, and perhaps Latoya's boyfriends have, too. Because lots of alcoholics happen to live in fancy homes, Blau might argue, what sets Joe apart isn't his drinking but his poverty.

Conservatives can make hay with the same facts. Joe could earn more if he drank less and Latoya should have devoted her youth to books, not babies. Because lots of disadvantaged people have overcome hard times with hard work, White might argue, what sets Joe and Latoya apart is their character, not their external oppression. My guess is that Blau and White would agree on at least one thing: that 20 years ago, the world was more forgiving—with more jobs for

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Joe, higher benefits for Latoya, and cheaper apartments for both.

Both of these books offer moments of insight, but readers of *The Washington Monthly* are unlikely to find either of them satisfying. Both suffer from the absence of real, flesh-and-blood homeless people. And both work too hard to accommodate their ideology, giving them a tendentious feel at times as the authors work overtime to explain away inconvenient facts. I left a trail of exclamation points as I read, filling the margins with "Yes! and "No!" on alternating pages. "Yes!" when White spots how unions of mental health workers sometimes promote their own interests over those of their patients, "No!" when he convinces himself that reporters and activists are part of a cultural elite trying to put down American values. I suspect much of what is written about homelessness leaves many people feeling that way. It rarely seems to be telling the whole story.

The strengths and weaknesses of the two books are those of the left and right more generally. Blau sometimes writes with an annoyingly conspiratorial tone, as if the worldwide economic changes were plotted out by David Rockefeller and Henry Kissinger over sherry in the Chase Manhattan boardroom. "Business sought to regain its competitiveness, but it did so by lowering everyone else's standard of living," he writes. Perhaps he even hears his own echo, because he warns at one point that "it would be far too conspiratorial to see any conscious plan" in the fate of the homeless. He also seems wedded to the zero-sum notion that if the rich gain, the poor must correspondingly suffer.

But if Blau sometimes seems too unwilling to confront the pathologies among the homeless, and too sanguine about the ability of vague "social services" to fix them, he performs an important service by pointing out the macro changes, such as those in the economy and the housing market. It's true that the homeless often behave irresponsibly, but Blau is right to insist that we look elsewhere as well. Either serious changes are occurring in the housing and labor markets, he writes, or "for some mysterious reason, a sizeable group of citizens suddenly became irresponsible at the very same time."

The problem with White's book is that he is obsessed with the provocative tactics of a few national leaders. Yes, Mitch Snyder wildly overestimated the number of homeless people, and underestimated their problems. (He also exhibited great personal courage and inspired thousands of people to do something about homelessness.) Like some other neoconservatives, White gets so distracted by periodic lefty goofiness that he forgets the underlying problem—to use his terms, he's more passionate about those who "lie" about injustice than those who suffer it. His disdain for the advocates causes him to lapse, every 10 pages or so, into a kind of prissy civics lesson. "Society does not work when it is run on an adversary basis," he lectures. He calls for advocates to adhere to "enduring civilized values."

That said, I wound up liking White—sort of despite himself. His book can be read as the battle of an open mind against a jerking knee, and there are some interesting results. "My visceral response was that homelessness was a manufactured crisis," he said. But after doing his research, he finds "I have moved toward the center" concluding that "even some increases in appropriations are warranted."

White has acquired a seemingly good sense of the con games on the streets. He understands that families in New York will make themselves homeless in order to move to the head of the public housing waiting list; that street alcoholics will use the offer of a shelter bed to free up extra money for drinking. At the same time, he is refreshingly skeptical about vague calls, like Blau's, for more "social services," and raises serious questions about the efficacy of drug and alcohol treatment programs. He makes the politically incorrect, but intriguing, point that what may be the best alcohol treatment program ever devised, Alcoholics Anonymous, operates without a cent of public money. He looks for causes of homelessness in some of the less-obvious places, like exclusionary zoning laws that drive up the cost of housing, and the state legislators who sometimes keep open inefficient mental hospitals to protect local jobs when money would be better spent elsewhere. He takes a nice swing at Ronald Reagan for his mean purge of the disability rolls, which disqualified hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people simply for administrative reasons. White concludes that the "thoughtless action unquestionably increased the numbers of homeless, perhaps by many thousands." There's one other interesting factoid buried in this book: the history of the term "skid row," which White traces to the logging district in old Seattle, where logs once traveled down along "skid road."

Helter shelter

In the decade-long debate over homelessness, no topic is more controversial than Bob Hayes' famous statement that the solution can be found in three words: "housing, housing, housing." White argues, with reason, that apartments alone will do little for addicts who turn them into crack dens or schizophrenics who leave to wander the streets. He is so addled by Hayes' slogan that he mockingly appropriates the quote to label one of his chapters.

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So his pseudo-confession, midway through the book, that "housing nevertheless is an important contributory factor," carries major importance. "Housing that is acceptable to economically marginal families and individuals and those with special problems has been disappearing," he writes, "even while the supply for many of us has been increasing and improving."

There's a lesson in the fact that this takes White by surprise. The sweeping change in the low-income housing market over the past two decades is one of the most important, and least publicized, developments in the lives of poor Americans. In an odd way, the trend itself has been obscured by the homelessness that it has helped cause. So much ideological energy has been spent attacking or defending the idea that the homeless are "just like you and me," and that housing is all they need, that the dismal facts about the low-cost housing market have gotten shunted aside. When, after all, did you last hear a national politician talk of them?

So much energy has been spent attacking or defending the idea that the homeless are "just like you and me," and that housing is all they need, that the dismal facts about the low-cost housing market have gotten shunted aside. When, after all, did you last hear a national politician talk of them?

Essentially three things have happened: The number of families needing cheap units has grown, the number of cheap private units has shrunk, and the slowing pace of government assistance has failed to make up the difference. The reason more families need cheap apartments is not just that population has grown. Families have also fragmented into more households, and wages have fallen. The reasons that cheap units have disappeared include gentrification, urban renewal, and inflation in construction and utility costs that have outstripped the cost of living. The destruction of single-room occupancy units (nearly a million of them during the seventies by Blau's count) has been much commented on, and both Blau and White agree that it has left many people homeless. But that is just part of a much more widespread change in the low-income housing market.

A study last year by two liberal Washington organizations—the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and the National Low Income Housing Service—makes the point clear with some troubling numbers. Since 1970, the number of low-income renters has grown by 41 percent, to 9.6 million; but over the same period, the number of cheap units available shrank by 14 percent, to 5.5 million. In 1970, there were 400,000 more cheap units than needy households, but by 1990 the situation had dramatically reversed, with 4.1 million fewer units than renters. (Low-income renters were defined as those making less than $10,000 a year in 1989 terms and cheap apartments were defined as those costing less than $250 a month.)

The study estimated that almost half of the poor who rent homes in the United States now spend more than 70 percent of their income to do so. Statistics that bleak usually come as the result of ideological spin. So it came as a real alarm when John Weicher, a conservative Republican who serves as an assistant housing secretary, said he agreed with the basic conclusions. "Sure do," he said. "We've been saying so for a long time. If you're trying to get a disagreement on that, I'm probably of no help."

Blau concludes: "More than any other single phenomenon," it is the "relative increase in housing costs that explains the growth of the homeless population." White concludes: "When rent was cheaper, and single-occupancy units were plentiful, the results of substance abuse did not as often lead to actual homelessness as they do today; in that sense, homelessness is a housing shortage."

In other words, "housing, housing, housing," may not be the whole solution to homelessness, but it's certainly a big part of it. The trends aren't encouraging. From 1977 to 1980, the government added an average of 290,000 subsidized units a year; for the past 10 years, however, the average has been only 78,000 units. Blau warns that when some accounting tricks catch up with the feds in a few years they will be able to afford even less.

Both Blau and White are clear that the market alone will not produce low-income housing. It is just too costly to build without government subsidies. In fact, both authors stress that, with the mortgage interest and property tax deductions, there really is very little unsubsidized housing in America. Blau puts the cost of the deductions at more than $50 billion next year—and the richer you are, the bigger your federal subsidy.

And there, in the back drop, is Sam Pierce, presiding over the plunder of a housing agency that was

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supposed to be helping the poor. There are the savings and loans, whose profligacy overwhelms the imagination. There are the Bush administration antipoverty memos that warn that concentrating on poverty might give the issue "greater visibility." There are the 270 minutes of televised presidential debate, where the subject of homelessness never even arose. White is right that in a decade of homeless advocacy, there's been some "lying." But in the end, this sounds like a story of injustice to me. □

Elliott's Mess

In an attempt to clear his name, Elliott Abrams further muddies it

by Walter Pincus

Undue Process: A Story of How Political Differences Are Turned into Crimes
Elliott Abrams. *The Free Press, $22.95.*

I don't know Elliott Abrams personally. From watching his performances on television in the late eighties and reading about him, I grew to question his views. Abrams was the confident, know-it-all, top-level Reagan administration appointee in the State Department who pushed the controversial pro-contra program from 1985 to 1987. He obviously enjoyed the role as instigator in rough and tumble confrontational politics, whether with senators and congressmen or members of the press. His appearances on Capitol Hill and his particularly contemptuous attitude toward Congress and the legislative process itself bothered me.

I spent two 18-month stints during the sixties helping run a pair of Senate Foreign Relations Committee investigations for Chairman J. William Fulbright of Arkansas. Both investigations resulted in new legislation: The first in a tougher registration law for foreign lobbyists and the second in an amendment limiting appropriations for the Vietnam War. There was partisan disagreement on the latter, but once it became law, even the Nixon administration abided by its terms. Compare that to the Boland amendments enacted in the late eighties and intended to limit the Reagan administration's support of Nicaraguan rebels.

My tours on Capitol Hill were among the most productive and satisfying professional experiences I've had. They provided me with a firsthand opportunity to see not only the flaws in the congressional system, but also the positive way our system of checks and balances can work when both the executive and the legislature play by common rules and have the country's interests—not their own—uppermost in their minds.

It was with this background, a bias some may say, and six years covering the Iran-contra scandal, that I approached this book. I thought it would be, as described in its subtitle, "A story of how political differences are turned into crimes." It isn't.

The book contains no serious discussions of the political differences that existed between the White House and Capitol Hill over the U.S. role in Nicaragua. And there is little in the way of thoughtful reflection about crimes.

Instead, this a very personal memoir, sometimes embarrassingly so. It is riveting because it portrays a man so different from the Elliott Abrams we have come to know through the media. If you disliked him and the harm the contra policies he espoused caused others (tens of thousands dead in Nicaragua and El Salvador), you'll not be saddened to read of his mental suffering. On the other hand, his friends say they became engrossed in the book because Abrams depicts the injustice he felt had been visited on him because he had honestly pursued what he believed were correct policies.

The Elliott Abrams at the beginning of the book has the flavor—the audacity, the drive, and the hint of operating just over his head—of the man we think we know. After graduating from Harvard Law School, he worked on the 1976 campaign of Senator Henry Jackson and then took a Capitol Hill job with the newly elected senator from New York, Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

By 1980, Abrams had left to practice law on Wall Street. He was drawn to that year's presidential cam-

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paign, though not to the Democrats who no longer represented his "strongly held views." Abrams doesn't outline them but apparently they were "spirited anti-communism" and "American military strength"—two qualities, he says, that convinced him that Ronald Reagan should win.

Reagan's victory set Abrams on a heady trip up the power ladder. First, the post-election transition team sent him to the Agency for International Development.

He calculated that his Moynihan connection might qualify him for something involving the United Nations, perhaps deputy assistant secretary of state in the International Organization Bureau—not because Abrams knew anything about the U.N. or believed in its mission but because Moynihan had been an ambassador there.

Then comes the kind of self-revelation in this book that makes it fascinating. "When I told Moynihan what I hoped to ask the Reagan personnel office for, he raised an eyebrow: Why deputy assistant secretary, he asked? Ask for assistant secretary! What the hell! I did, and after a good round of pushing and shoving among the personnel people, got it."

Abrams offers another honest reflection about what drives him: "The job had many satisfactions, not least of [having] full assistant secretary rank." But it didn't have the power he wanted because, as he puts it, "real influence" over U.S. policy toward the U.N. rested with the U.S. ambassador, Jeane Kirkpatrick. So just months later, carrying his assistant secretary rank, Abrams slid over to a new job, heading the State Department's Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs.

This "relic of the Carter foreign policy," he writes, was "smaller, less prestigious, and less influential" than the bureau Abrams was leaving but he could turn it into a Reagan tool.

But in 1985, the ultimate plum fell his way. Then-Secretary of State George Shultz offered Abrams the job of assistant secretary for inter-American affairs. Abrams knew he was going "from the pantry into a bonfire burning with very high flames." But, as usual, his eyes were on the prize. "My staff would grow from 25 to 200; I would be responsible for the three dozen U.S. embassies in Latin America and the Caribbean; I would deal with Latin presidents, with the Defense Department, and the CIA and with the White House and the National Security Council, regularly."

That was the Abrams most of his critics knew and disliked, a shallow hired gun on the make. That version, however, fades with the onset of the Iran-contra scandal and vanishes with his departure from government at the end of the Reagan administration.

Another Elliott Abrams emerges, a fragile man frightened out of his wits. This Elliott Abrams can't make up his mind and even occasionally wishes he were dead. He suffers this torment solely because he believes he is being unfairly hounded by Lawrence E. Walsh, a lifelong Republican, former deputy attorney general in the Nixon administration, federal judge, and distinguished Wall Street lawyer, who now is the court-appointed independent counsel investigating the Iran-contra affair.

According to Abrams, Walsh relentlessly and unjustly pursued him, influenced and assisted by a group of fame-seeking, bloodthirsty, and—God forbid—ambitious young lawyers. The book's other villain is Craig A. Gillen, Walsh's deputy counsel.

What Abrams captures memorably are the physical and mental effects that the fear of prosecution and conviction engenders in him.

But nowhere in this book does one get the sense that Abrams ever had second thoughts about the legitimacy of his policies and the terrible loss of life and destruction they brought to people in Nicaragua. After all, these were men, women and children even more innocent than he.

It's just the other way around in the few instances when he reflects on the situation in Central America. In a brief reference to then-Speaker Thomas "Tip" O'Neill's "adamant" opposition to approving new funds for the contras, Abrams snidely attributes O'Neill's views to "a niece of his who was a Maryknoll nun," who "apparently believed the Sandinistas were distributing loaves and fishes, Bible in hand." Abrams never mentions that the Maryknolls became an issue when four members of their order were murdered in El Salvador.

Violent femme

A major jolt in the book is the portrait Abrams paints of his wife Rachel. It is she, not Abrams, who is the warrior, the aggressive advocate, the person of steel. But he takes it one step further. He makes her a foul-mouthed avenger.

Early in the book, when Walsh's hot breath is upon him, Abrams ruminates: "I never wondered what Rachel felt. I knew. She felt, above all, a violent rage at the people who were doing this to her husband. She would have killed them if she could. She would have erased them from the face of the earth without a second thought, and never looked back. She'd have shot Craig Gillen through the heart and gone on to a Little League game. In the best of spirits."

To save his career, his family, and his money, Abrams pleads guilty to several misdemeanors and comes uncomfortably to accept and live with this decision. Rachel does not. We learn this through a letter

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she wrote to a friend that Abrams includes in his book.

"Dear J," it begins, "I am sitting here going mad, crawling out of my skin, feeling this worm of rage turning, turning inside me, and I don't know what to do with it. . . . I entered here [Washington], this concrete-covered swamp, almost 12 years ago, left New York and all behind me, brimming with hope. I was married to this golden man, my prize. And here I am, clenching, grinding my teeth, wondering how to save him from, how to hurt, how to savage, how to kill, the people who have called him a criminal."

Rachel's letter goes on for three pages, boiling with rage. She describes looking at Gillen in the courtroom as Abrams pled guilty: "My eyes burning with the effort, and I can't unglue them from [Gillen], but he won't look at me. I shout at him inside my head, 'You son of a bitch, fuck you fuck you fuck you, you son of a bitch!' at such tremendous, thundering pitch, I wonder if I am actually saying it out loud, if he can hear it."

Martyr dumb

There are a few moments of humor in the book, though it's doubtful Abrams intended them as such. The most memorable is when Abrams and his wife decided they had to tell their three children that their father might be publicly involved in the Iran-contra scandal. It's a scene out of a neocon Ozzie and Harriet show.

> You remember Nicaragua, and the contras, and how they were fighting the communists in Nicaragua? Well, I knew lots of secrets about that, and Secretary Shultz and President Reagan didn't want me to tell. Now, some people are saying, you should have told Congress. You had to tell. When they asked you, you had to tell, and not telling is a crime. And I am saying, no it isn't.

The most sophisticated child in this particular family was Jacob, the 10-year-old. Whereas Sarah immediately saw the fallacy in anyone arguing you should tell leaky old Congress secret information, Jacob quickly caught a more important nuance. After Abrams gave him a briefing "of the facts," Jacob asked his dad: "If they're accusing you, what about Ronald Reagan? What about George Bush? Why don't they get accused too? . . . Jacob understood it better than I did. Why indeed?" As with the rest of his life, Abrams turned to his wife. "I left Rachel to try and answer questions that I had tried hard not to ask myself." Too bad. That would have made for just as interesting reading and perhaps even some thought.

The whole background of Abrams' alleged crime is curiously absent. Nowhere does Abrams describe what he actually *did* as assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs.

A brief precis: As chairman of the Restricted Interagency Group, Abrams, along with Oliver North and Alan D. Fiers Jr., chief of the CIA's Central American Task Force, effectively ran American policy in a way that some critics now say kept the fighting going an extra year in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

In 1986, Abrams acted as point man to lobby Congress to renew U.S. financial support for the covert war in Nicaragua. He also gave life to every rumor of Soviet and Cuban intervention and dismissed anything critical of the contras. One week before a key congressional vote on the $100 million request for the contras, he cooked up the story of a Nicaraguan defector who claimed the Sandinistas were going to assemble a half-million-person army. Later he generated fears about an invasion of Honduras by the Sandinistas. He emphasized the growth of contra forces during the congressional ban on U.S. aid while hiding knowledge that secret funding for the rebels was coming from the Saudis.

When a contra resupply plane was shot down over Nicaragua on October 5, 1986, it was Abrams who gave the untrue, blanket denial of U.S. government involvement. As stories leaked out about U.S. solicitation of third country aid to the contras, he gave inaccurate answers to Congress about that fundraising, cleverly trying to hide his own role in seeking funds from Brunei.

Walsh, with testimony from Fiers and others, finally got Abrams to plead guilty to withholding information from two congressional committees—he was charged with misdemeanors rather than felonies for the lies he told.

I have spent 37 years in Washington, the first two in the Army and the rest as a journalist, with only three years off for my two sabbaticals with the Fulbright committee. In that time I have met my share of ambitious political appointees and ideologues from the left, right, and center. Abrams represents a new breed. He's someone with so little respect for democratic institutions that when he violates them he doesn't realize it. He is so self-indulgent that he appears to have no concern for the impact on others of the policies he and his administration promote. And he is so self-centered that when he becomes the focus of an investigation that can't be stopped by his political bosses, he considers himself a victim of unprecedented persecution. If Rachel's once "golden boy" is a model of the new generation of conservative Republican public servant, we are in for trouble when they occupy the White House again. □

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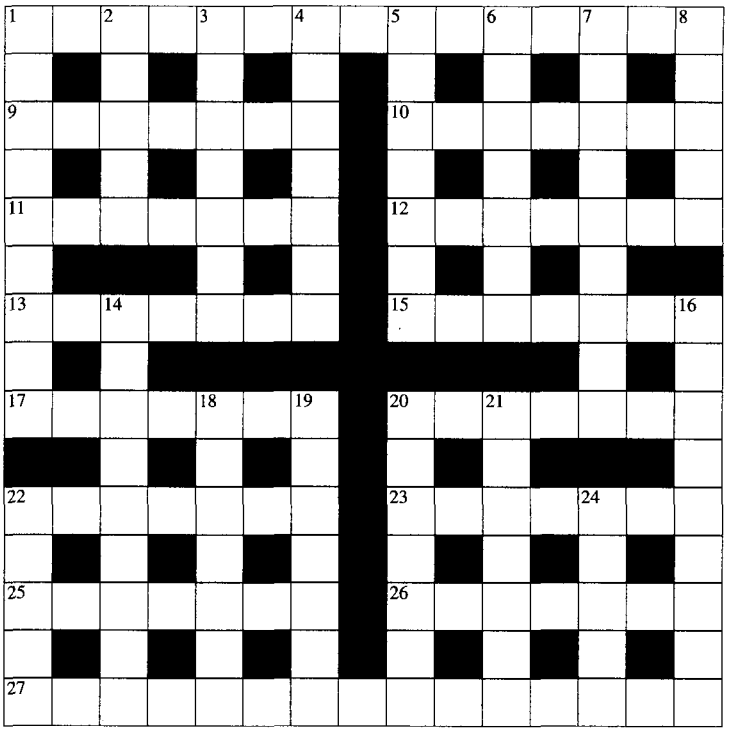
POLITICAL PUZZLE

by John Barclay

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g. (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g. USA, are treated as one word.



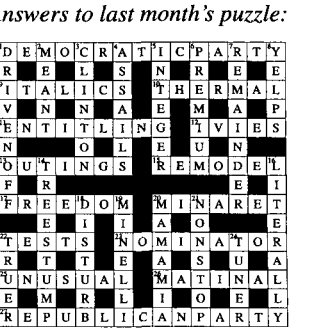
ACROSS

1. Washington group never set Pirates off. (15)
9. Call etc. in a way or in a manner of speaking. (7)
10. Built pens and included both sides. (7)
11. Set down Albuquerque institution taking count without leader. (7)
12. Discipline is stern for additions to text. (7)
13. Incorrectly presume in front of Washington court. (7)
15. Measured rodent fit? (7)
17. Country crime controlled in health group. (7)
20. Star's address pretty near Elm. (7)
22. Mix ally up with false start in sport. (7)
23. Get again, moving nearer around 50. (7)
25. Made rain, not French palace. (7)
26. Roll small average around in total. (7)
27. Give side toy ball tossed for democratic gathering. (11, 4)

DOWN

1. Former antagonist sure raids slyly. (3, 6)
2. Switched lamps for Biblical presentation. (5)
3. Kill or implement a proposal? (7)
4. In accident it legitimately appears to qualify. (7)
5. Chop it rates higher in satisfaction. (7)
6. Crossing Nova Scotia in special manner. (7)
7. Managed Bern leave maintaining respect. (7)
8. Teams apply scent first before date. (5)
14. Railroad takes simian back in sonar test before first step. (9)
16. Disrupt any teller not operating in mortal manner. (9)
18. Those at an early stage waving tin fans. (7)
19. Olympic site set at an altitude. (7)
20. Electronic immortal rotated iron cam. (7)
21. Cure throbbing liver with ease. (7)
22. Friend takes in alien for rose remnant. (5)
24. Loam cultivated after April one for historic site. (5)

Answers to last month's puzzle:



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POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

The Bias-Free Word Finder: A Dictionary of Nondiscriminatory Language
Rosalie Maggio
Beacon, $15

Okay, so I've committed a few false generics in my time. I'll even admit to linguistic perjoration. And, yes, I've dabbled in sexual asymmetry, though I never developed a taste for exonyming. Still, I always thought I could get along quite well without a dictionary of nondiscriminatory language. But Rosalie Maggio, author of *The Bias-Free Word Finder*, has shown me the prejudice of my ways (not to mention expanded my use of academic jargon). Having now carefully examined some 5,000 words, phrases, or expressions that reportedly oppress, exclude, or offend, as well as 15,000 alternatives, I've never felt more semantically challenged. Apparently I've been committing a whole host of socially unattractive sins, including adultism and—this one really hurts—orgasm-as-norm thinking.

Maggio considers words like nubile, petite, brazen, curmudgeon, and bruiser as "sexist." Bombshell has to go because it's also "militaristic and violent," as do Renaissance man, dirty old man ("conveys very little real information"), Big Brother, Caesar's wife, and deus ex machina (deus is in the masculine gender). Instead of milquetoast, Maggio suggests "someone with cold feet." She would replace raise Cain with "lecture," "make mischief," or simply "carry on." Chuck Achilles' heel for "where the shoe pinches." "Made of money" is deemed a perfect substitute for rich as Croesus. Hunk for men is verboten; use "centerfold" instead.

Can you imagine having dinner with this woman?

Like many p.c. reformers, Maggio has erred on the side of self-parody. Certainly it's hard to argue with her basic contention that language influences culture as much as culture influences language. And some of what she proposes is perfectly reasonable: parallel treatment for the sexes (husband and wife, for example, not man and wife); people first (a person with a disability, not a disabled person); and an "insider/outsider" rule (derogatory words should be used only by groups to describe themselves).

But the problem is that Maggio goes well beyond banishing words that offend or exclude people. She believes we must rid the language of all words and phrases that are gender- or race-specific, no matter how inoffensive and regardless of the spirit in which they are uttered. Maggio would like to castrate (sorry: "draw the teeth of," "spike the guns of") the language, to make it into a prosaic eunuch ("pushover," "doormat"). She sees this as not only making the world a better place, but as making writers better at their craft. "By replacing fuzzy, overgeneralized, cliché-ridden words with explicit, active words and by giving concrete examples and anecdotes instead of one-word-fits-all descriptions you can express yourself more dynamically, convincingly, and memorably."

But many of Maggio's linguistic tinkerings seem random. For instance, we are allowed to retain sexist names for nonhumans, such as alewife, timothy grass, daddy longlegs, sweet william, and myrtle. The alternatives for a word like ditz don't seem all that friendly: "missing some marbles," "mind like a sieve," "not all there." Beach bunny and bosom buddy are not heavily discouraged. For all of you who've taken to replacing -man with -person, be advised that this "weak, awkward, and annoying suffix . . . is not generally recommended."

And then there's the condescending tone that turns up throughout the book: "Readers may choose words at their own levels of understanding and commitment"; writers using biased words like right-hand man "leave their readers as uninspired as they are." Under "Amazon/amazon": "Use the term only if you understand its history and multiple connotations." And my favorite: "If you must think in halves. . . ."

Although the book is intended as a dictionary, you have to read it through first to get your money's worth. Otherwise, you're bound to miss the numerous mini-essays that appear throughout, offering insights on such issues as body image, aggression, and homophobia. You also miss lots of factoids of questionable significance. For instance: 36 percent of embezzlers and less than 1 percent of U.S. auto mechanics are women.

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Defending herself against presumably numerous critics who have mocked her zealotry, Maggio writes: "But then ridicule, it is said, is the first and last argument of fools." Well, call me a fool, I guess, because I found this word finder a lot more silly than useful. You don't need a lexicologist to tell you that the attitude behind the usage of many words is more important than the words themselves. But a dictionary of this type makes no such distinctions, in the same way that books decrying women's use of make-up or plastic surgery condemn the product or service rather than the questionable motivating factors. Continuing to expand a list of un-p.c. no-nos will do little to create a more egalitarian society or raise anyone's self-esteem—though it's a perfect way to avoid focusing on underlying causes and serious solutions.

—Karen Lehrman

Crime Scene: On the Streets with a Rookie Police Reporter
Mitch Gelman
Times, $21

As lawyers trudge their way through law school and clerkships and as doctors are hardened in their residencies, newspaper reporters cut their teeth covering the police beat. These reporters, often the paper's youngest and most naive, will stay out latest, and work cheapest. The beat demands little historical or theoretical knowledge. Particularly in the days when many reporters hadn't gone to college, the police beat offered papers a controlled and demanding area to teach the newest hires.

Mitch Gelman joined *Newsday* in 1986 as a researcher and politicked his way onto the metro staff a year later. He files this book having spent three and a half years learning journalism by jamming out 1,100 stories on the endless crime that plagues and defines much of New York. Although it's well written, this is a limited and frustrating book—but its shortcomings reveal much about the news business.

Having myself just finished three years of covering similar cop beats at several newspapers, I found the book a believable introduction to the police reporter's world. From the constant battles with police officials to the rivalry between and within staffs for space and attention, Gelman's book is valuably honest. Gelman shows how news judgments are often shaped by insecurities. He describes how, trying to convince the mother of a 10-year-old rape victim to allow him to interview the child, he stopped worrying about doing what is right, and wanted only to get a story the other papers didn't have. "The dirty little secret about ethics in journalism is that at times like this, there are none," he writes.

Gelman concentrates on the tension between reporters seeking drama and police departments seeking order. Machismo and favors count. Police bureaucracies are instinctively protective about everything they know, but reporters are expected to develop sources. Gelman uses some of his best —a doctor at Kings County Hospital, a fed-up transit policeman, the wife of a wounded officer—to show that the crime reporter must know the right people in order to bridge the gap between the department line and the truth.

Unfortunately, Gelman quits as soon as he's explained the task of the reporter, leaving the book essentially a diary. The New York police beat ought to provide some of the best sociological material in the country, but he offers little about collisions of race, politics, and economics.

Like Gelman, many of today's newspaper and television reporters have covered cops, but it is only recently that the police beat has acquired cachet. Traditional press histories like Richard Kluger's *The Paper* and David Halberstam's *The Powers That Be* mention police reporting only in passing.

Things changed six years ago when *The Miami Herald*'s Edna Buchanan won a Pulitzer Prize for her wonderfully reported but overwritten police coverage. The memoir that followed, *The Corpse Had a Familiar Face*, became an inspiration for countless reporters who felt themselves stagnating on the same beats. Consider, for instance, Buchanan's lead to a story of a man who was shot during an argument he started at a fast-food restaurant: "Gary Robinson died hungry."

Gelman hasn't decided what tradition he believes in—the formalism of Halberstam or Buchanan's flashbulb postmodernism. Gelman sounds almost old-school as he writes of the guilt he feels as he breaks the bounds of privacy in pursuing a story. Just pages later, however, he lustily returns to taste-be-damned:

> Two shots echoed in the hallway. One blasted off half of Gunn's head, the other hit him in the stomach. Gunn and his Inspector Clouseau hat tumbled down the staircase. Richardson [the alleged gunman] escaped in his pajamas, climbing through a hatch in the roof.

In Gelman's world, there is no ethical dilemma in this gory overdramatization, in insisting on interviews with families of gunshot and rape victims, or in bringing a cake to bribe his way into a wounded officer's family home. In these situations the reporter's mantra may once have been "I'm just doing my job." In Gelman's world it is "I deserve this information, let me in!"

—Ross Kerber

Making Americans: An Essay on Individualism and Money
Quentin Anderson
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, $21.95

How did it happen that, of all recent presidents, it was Ronald Reagan who sounded at times like Henry David Thoreau? "This government never of itself furthered any enterprise, but by the alacrity with which it got out of the way," Thoreau wrote in his famous essay *Civil Disobedience*. It could just as easily have been Reagan.

Yet they were utterly opposite in almost every way. Thoreau was writing in protest of the Mexican War, the kind of imperial skirmish that Reagan would have gloried in. He lived (more or less) in a hut, and wrote with dismay about the commercial culture that, a century later, Reagan shilled for as TV spokesman for G.E. "I think there is nothing, not even crime, more opposed . . . to life itself," Thoreau wrote, "than this incessant business." Reagan, by contrast, thought the market—business—was synonymous with life itself. Yet for all this, the two could sound so much the same.

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The paradox has a pointed relevance for Democrats, as Bill Clinton takes office with an opportunity to change the party's gestalt for a generation. National Democrats foundered during the seventies and eighties in part because they lost touch with the language of American individualism—aspiration, enterprise and responsibility for one's lot. Reagan meanwhile turned these into poetry, even though his policies often promoted corporate rather than individual endeavor, and even though he often exempted the very rich from the rigors of the market. Now Clinton has begun to claim the language back, and it behooves Democrats to re-examine the roots of the individualist tradition, both to inform their policies and prepare themselves for the assaults that Republicans are already preparing for 1996.

I thought this book would help. It comes with a tantalizing subtitle, "An Essay on Individualism and Money," and a list of literary subjects that cranks anticipation into high gear. At last, we are going to get past the wearisome invocations of the "Greed Decade" and start to place this epoch—which Reagan hosted rather than invented—within the deeper currents of American thought and life.

The author, a retired Columbia professor, does touch upon these themes. But regrettably, his frame of reference is almost entirely literary, and his book falls into a genteel literary version of the trap that has bedeviled the liberal mind for decades. Recoiling from the individualism of the corporate capitalist, liberals tend to lose contact with a larger part of the American psyche: the urge toward individual enterprise, the dislike of regulation and bureaucracy, and the spiritual/religious drama of redemption and reform, all of which provide much of the subtext of America's political discourse.

To be sure, liberals generally do embrace the individualist ethos in such realms as sexual preference and artistic expression. (Anderson doesn't dwell on such subjects.) But neither gay rights nor Karen Finley's performance art helps bridge the gap to mainstream voters. This left a large realm of emotive discourse to be dominated by the Reagans in the name of financial gain, to the exclusion of the other directions in which it can be channeled.

That's the sad part. Individualism isn't something liberals need to fear. Social reformers like Martin Luther King and environmental prophets like John Muir drew from the great individualist tradition that Thoreau helped define. Ralph Nader could capture the imagination of mainstream America with a radically anti-corporate message because he was the plucky individual who took on General Motors. In other words, because he was so American.

Anderson starts out with a premise that is promising enough, if not especially original. The Industrial Revolution came at a time when America was socially still a blank slate. Europe had centuries of tradition and culture to serve as ballast against the new commercial juggernaut. But in Jacksonian America, there was little to restrain the market and the kind of man it created. Money increasingly defined both who you were and the way you related to others.

As America's folkways gave way to the factory, the railroad, and the surging forces of acquisition, protest writers had little to harken to by way of alternative tradition. So, beginning with Emerson and Thoreau, they harkened instead to themselves. They began, Anderson argues, a literary retreat into the private precincts of self-discovery and self-expression. This continued, in divergent ways, in such writers as Walt Whitman and John Dewey, on up through the Beats and the counterculture of the sixties.

The result, he suggests, is much as when a child, rebelling against a parent, turns out just like that parent. Instead of offering a real alternative to commercial man, these writers lapsed into "an individualism that apes the impersonality of what it opposes and attenuates our ties to human others." (As opposed to what other kind of "others," he doesn't say.) This is why Thoreau and Reagan could meet at the point on the circle at which they were furthest apart. "Both for those absorbed in the pursuit of money and for those with visionary claims for the self, the term 'future' refers to acquisition—more profit or broader visionary claims."

Anderson has certainly struck a fertile theme. It could help explain, for example, a peculiar feature of left-wing publications like the *Village Voice*—the way their self-absorbed politics of libido embrace the raw Id of the commercial culture they purport to oppose. It could also explain how the sixties and the eighties were mainly different sides of the same coin, rather than different coins. Sixties-types-turned-Reaganites such as P. J. O'Rourke make a big deal about crossing over from their former ways. But actually, they've stayed pretty much where they were. It was Reagan, not Carter or Mondale, who brought the blissed-out romanticism of the sixties—the lobotomized Thoreau—into presidential discourse. Reagan's economics were the do-your-own-thing hedonism of the drug culture transferred to the financial realm. The O'Rourkes who supported him didn't switch their ideology. They just traded pot for royalty checks.

Occasionally, Anderson generates a little literary steam in such directions. At one point, for example, he discusses why *Moby Dick* didn't get the recognition it deserved until after World War II. Melville was writing for people "disengaged (like Ishmael) from engrossing social ties," he says, and it was not until the post-war diaspora that this rootless quality became a common experience in American life. That thought could start a major drumroll. But soon Anderson is back to his syllabus of texts. He writes with a muted elegance, a reluctance to join battle with—or even explore—anything on the current scene. That gives a lay reader an exasperating sense of wading through a crate of cotton. Those who aren't up on *Bartleby the Scrivener* and the work of Henry James may find themselves lost.

The result is ironic. Preaching a literature of social engagement, Anderson disengages from the life and controversies that his readers actually experience. A book published in 1992 that purports to explore "individualism and money" in American life that barely mentions such names as Milken, Reagan, Gilder, or Kemp? That leaves off the story with the controversy over a reading by Beat poets at Columbia in the fifties?

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Anderson's annoyance with the Beats seems to be the animus of *Making Americans*. They affected him the way the New Left affected his more political contemporaries such as Irving Kristol, though Anderson's grudge is less personal and vindictive. He pines for the days when the *Partisan Review* crowd—Lionel Trilling, Arthur Schlesinger, etc.—wrought out a literary "middle ground" between the individual and society. His patron saint is Hawthorne, who recoiled from the transcendentalists and sought identity and destiny in the firmer earth of family and community ties.

Fair enough. But Anderson is foggy and academic where he needs to be current and specific. There has been a "waning of the intellectual's faith in the possibilities of discourse," he laments. Yet when I go to the newsstand I see an awful lot of discourse. Somebody seems to have faith in it. Because Anderson doesn't deal with that, I don't know what he means.

Anderson's heart is clearly in the right place, though, and it's not his fault the publisher tried to pitch the book to a wider audience than it actually addresses. There is no disputing, moreover, a solipsistic side to the American individualist tradition. But that's not all there is, and liberals in particular often need to be reminded of this. The conviction lies deep in the American soul that individuals are responsible in some degree for their lot, and are not just creatures or victims of social forces; that there should be a connection between individual effort and reward, and that social betterment begins with individual virtue and concern rather than brainy proposals from the policy schools.

These are "traditional values" that Democrats can recapture, as Clinton has begun to do. Some of the very writers Anderson disparages can be instructive in this regard. Anderson presents Emerson and Thoreau, for example, as apostles of self-absorbed hermitry, seeking a "solitary, total, and guiltless possession of the world." Certainly that strand exists. But neither Emerson nor Thoreau actually lived that way, and I doubt that many of their contemporary devotees live that way, either. Social import is found not just in texts, after all, but also in what people make of them. In Concord, Massachusetts, where Emerson and Thoreau both lived, Thoreau buffs recently organized to defeat a proposed office park development near Walden Pond. The path from *Civil Disobedience* doesn't have to lead to Reagan.

Thoreau the individualist, who strived to lead a life of principle, has provided a great continuing impetus for social justice as well. Gandhi was a great admirer, as was Martin Luther King. During the sit-in movement in Nashville, at the peak of the civil rights movement, a mimeographed memo circulated among the demonstrators that ended with the sentence, "Remember the teachings of Jesus, Gandhi, Thoreau, and Martin Luther King." This is hardly a hermetic or Reaganesque lineage, nor the worst we could seek to revive in America today.

—*Jonathan Rowe*

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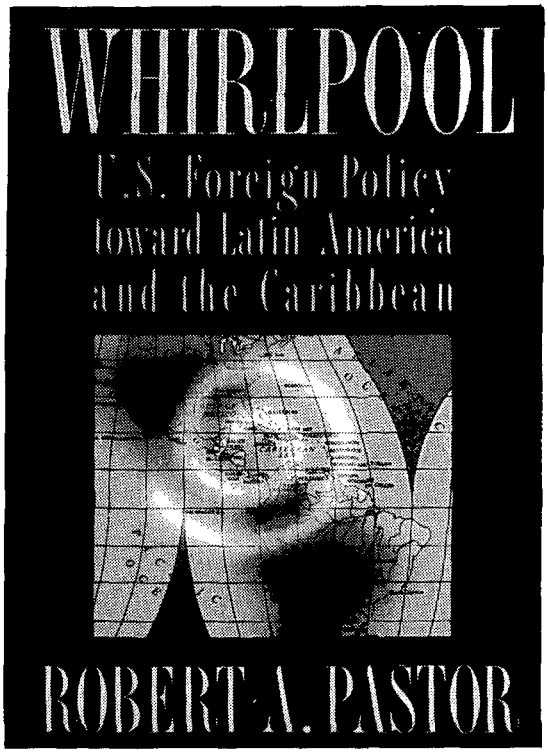

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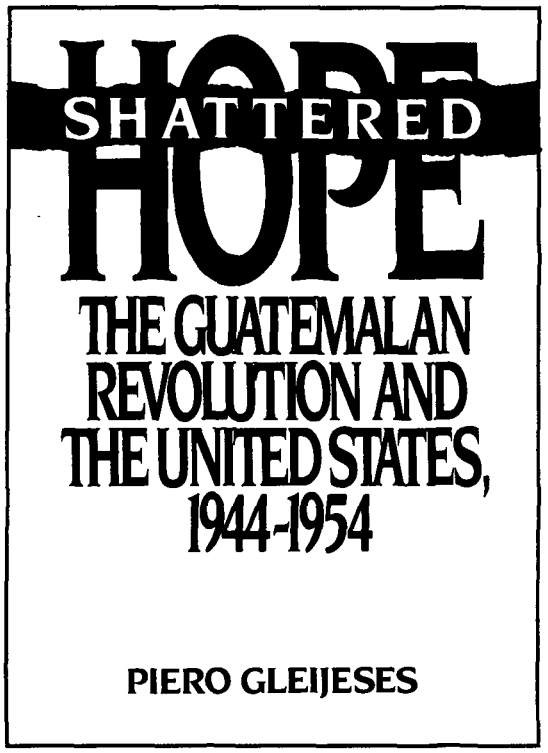

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